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Early Scottish museum collections of Haida argillite carving

By

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A thesis presented for the degree of PhD in Canadian Studies, University of Edinburgh

30 October 2015

Declaration

I declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. All the material presented for examination is my own work and has not been written for me, in whole or in part, by any other person. This work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except for this PhD in Canadian Studies at the University of Edinburgh.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

For the carvers and the collectors

Abstract

This thesis is about four historical collections of Haida argillite carvings now at the National Museum of Scotland, the University of Aberdeen Museums and the Perth Museum and Art Gallery. Since the early nineteenth century Haida artists have carved argillite, a carbonaceous shale, into objects featuring Haida and European-inspired motifs, for trade or sale to non-Haida others. Scots Colin Robertson, William Mitchell, James Hector and John Rae acquired argillite as part of broader collections from the Northwest Coast of Canada made during the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Each of these men was employed by, or affiliated with the Hudson's Bay Company. This thesis questions how the meanings and statuses of these objects, collected and deposited in Scottish museums between the 1820s and 1860s, have changed over the nearly two centuries of their existence.

Research at these three museums, and at British and Canadian archives, provided the material that shed light on the historical circumstances of the approximately 30 objects constituting these collections. Semi-structured interviews with Haida carvers, community members and experts, and with museum curators elicited insights into the ways these objects are made meaningful today.

The thesis examines the collections in four key contexts. First, it explores the ways in which they have been displayed and interpreted at the three museums, shedding light on the trajectories by which museums have represented the objects of others. Secondly, it describes the context in which the argillite carvings were produced, circulated and collected by sketching the social and political character of the Northwest Coast as it transformed through the decades of the fur trade to European colonization. How these objects transformed in status and value according to the agendas of their collectors is the third context, which reflects the character of relationships between Indigenous peoples and newcomers. Finally, I resituate these collections in the context of contemporary Haidas' perspectives on the value and meaning of argillite carving(s), and propose that these objects can be understood as "inalienable commodities."

The argillite carvings in these Scottish museum collections are objects of exchange, produced and circulated in the contact zone of the mid-nineteenth century Northwest Coast. As such, they are windows into relationships between Indigenous and European people during this period. Collected as curiosities but remade into objects of science, biography and art, this study traces their shifting statuses as they have moved through various regimes of value. This thesis therefore characterizes the exchanges that have occurred around these objects as ongoing and dynamic.

Acknowledgements

I first learned to appreciate Northwest Coast art in late October 1995 when my Grade 5 class made a fieldtrip to the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Gatineau. There, museum guides led us through the reconstructed Northwest Coast houses of the Museum's Grand Hall. Although it was a long time ago, I distinctly recall a learning session led by Museum interpreters, who had us colour in our own paper versions of northern Northwest Coast painted paddles. Such a basic introduction to the beautiful and compelling material productions of Northwest Coast peoples has stayed with me. It later developed into a professional interest beginning with my employment at the Museum as a student from 2007, until 2011 when I left to pursue graduate studies in Scotland. The submission of this thesis exactly twenty years later is a milestone in my life, and there are many supportive people to whom I am grateful.

The opportunity to pursue this PhD in Canadian Studies at the University of Edinburgh would not have been possible without the support of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences and the School for Social and Political Science. Travel within the UK and to various locations in Canada was made possible through the support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Canadian Centennial Scholarship Fund and the Foundation for Canadian Studies in the UK. By investing in my research, these organizations enabled me to access traces of these old Haida-Scottish collections at their disparate sources.

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World Cultures Department and gave me the opportunity to contribute to an exhibition and conference organized by the Museum. Former Assistant Curator Ross Irving hosted research visits and provided collections information from 2011 to 2014. Assistant Curator Gillian Ramsay provided the argillite images pictured throughout this thesis.

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Notes on terminology

Aboriginal, First Nations, Indigenous, Native: The term “Aboriginal” refers to the first inhabitants of Canada, including First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. “First Nations” refers to Aboriginal peoples in Canada who are neither Métis nor Inuit. The term “Indigenous” refers to a variety of Aboriginal peoples and is commonly used in a global context to refer to peoples “of long settlement and connection to specific lands who have been adversely affected by incursions by industrial economies, displacement and settlement of their traditional territories by others.” This thesis refers to Indigenous peoples in the most specific terms possible (e.g. Haida, Tsimshian, Tlingit). Otherwise, I use “Indigenous” and “Aboriginal” to refer to the original inhabitants of Canada. I use the term “Native” to refer a person who has originated from a particular place, and who may or may not be Aboriginal. (See “Terminology,” *Indigenous Foundations*, University of British Columbia, accessed 24 October 2015, <http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/identity/terminology.html>)

Argillite/slate: Argillite is the geological term for the carbonaceous shale quarried on Slatechuck Mountain. On Haida Gwaii, argillite is popularly referred to as “slate.” Its Haida name is “Hlgas7agaa.” (See Macnair and Hoover 2002: 11; Roth 2015: 299). This thesis uses the term argillite since it is the term most commonly used in the scholarly literature.

Artists/carvers: I use these terms interchangeably to refer to those who carve argillite and/or work in other media such as wood. In my fieldwork interactions on Haida Gwaii many makers of art and cultural objects referred to themselves and their peers interchangeably as artists and carvers.

Northwest Coast: In the context of this thesis, the “Northwest Coast” refers to the region of land “occupied by those Aboriginal people living along the coastal strip from Yakutat Bay in Alaska through British Columbia and Washington State to the southern border of Oregon.” (See Jacknis 2013: 46).

Queen Charlotte Islands/Haida Gwaii: Haida Gwaii, an archipelago situated approximately 90 nautical miles off the coast of British Columbia, is the homeland of the Haida people. “Haida Gwaii” is the Haida’s name for this place, literally translating as “Islands of the People.” From 1787 to 2010, its official name was the “Queen Charlotte Islands,” named by Captain George Dixon after his ship the Queen Charlotte, which in turn was named after the wife of King George III. This thesis

refers to these islands in their historical context as the Queen Charlotte Islands, and when referring to them in contemporary times, as Haida Gwaii.

Slatechuck: Slatechuck is the name of the site at which argillite is quarried. The Haida name for Slatechuck Creek, near where material is obtained, is *tllgaduun randlaay*. In my fieldwork interactions, Haida carvers and community members most commonly referred to the site as “Slatechuck,” and so this thesis uses that name for the site.

Abbreviations

B.C. – British Columbia

BCPA – British Columbia Provincial Archives

BM – British Museum

HBC – Hudson's Bay Company

HBCA – Hudson's Bay Company Archives

NGC – National Gallery of Canada

NMS – National Museum of Scotland/National Museums Scotland

NWC – Northwest Company

PFC – Pacific Fur Company

PLAS – Perth Literary and Antiquarian Society

PMAG – Perth Museum and Art Gallery

UAM – University of Aberdeen Museums

UE – University of Edinburgh

UK – United Kingdom

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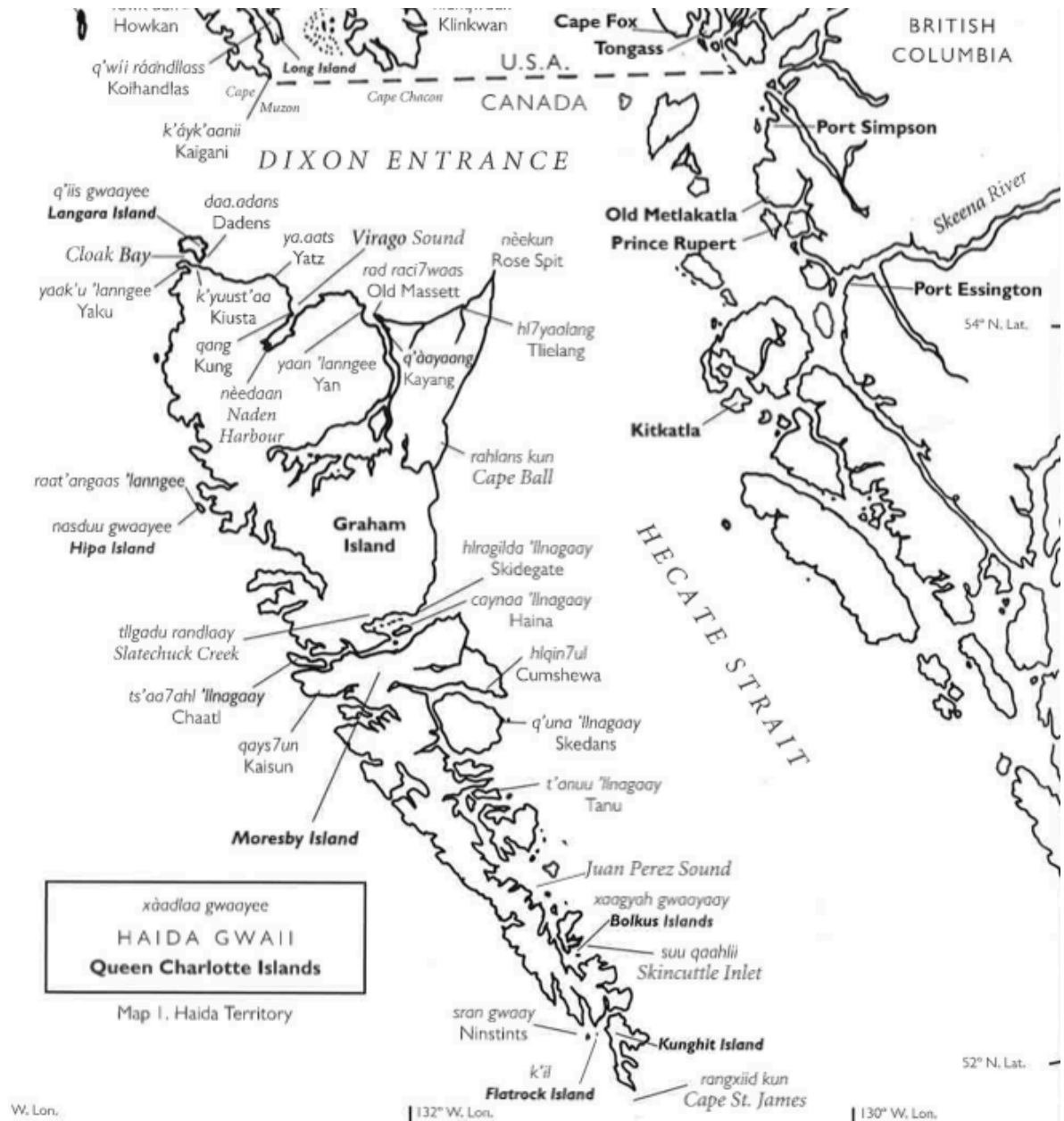
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Map 1. “The First Nations of the Northwest Coast.” From: Aaron Glass et al. *Objects of Exchange: Social and Material Transformation on the Late Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast*. New York: Bard Graduate Centre, 2011, 240.



Map 2. “Haida Gwaii.” From: Robin K. Wright. *Northern Haida Master Carvers*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001. Map I, 10.

Haida Gwaii is home to some 5000 inhabitants, of whom approximately half are Haida. The Haida have occupied this archipelago from time immemorial. The Council of the Haida Nation is the political representative of the Haida people.



Map 3. Scotland. <http://www.scotland.com/maps/> (accessed 12 October 2015).

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 *Introduction*

Of the many types of documents through which to examine the entangled histories of Indigenous peoples and newcomers to the Northwest Coast of North America, Haida cultural objects collected by sailors, fur traders and explorers, now in the world's museums and private collections, are compelling and contested evidence of contact and exchange in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the years leading up to colonialism in British Columbia (B.C.).¹

This thesis examines four historical collections of argillite carving now at museums in Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Perth. For nearly two centuries, Haida artists have carved argillite, a slate-like material, into objects made for sale to non-Indigenous people, decorating them with European and Haida-inspired motifs, in the form of different object types including tobacco pipes, human figures, dinnerware and model totem poles. These museums hold argillite and other Northwest Coast collections donated by Scots employed by or affiliated with the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) through the decades of the land-based fur trade and colonial exploration, circa 1820s – 1860s. The collections of Perth native Colin Robertson at

¹ The British Crown chartered what is now the province of British Columbia as an official colony in 1858. Aaron Glass, ed. *Objects of Exchange: Social and Material Transformation on the Late Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (New York: Bard Graduate Centre, 2011), 15.

the Perth Museum and Art Gallery (PMAG), Captain William Mitchell at the University of Aberdeen Museums (UAM), Dr James Hector at the National Museum of Scotland (NMS), and Dr John Rae at the University of Edinburgh (UE)/NMS, are the topic of this thesis. These approximately 30 objects were collected as curiosities, souvenirs and specimens along trade routes, at trading posts and developing colonial centres. The collections have much to tell us about the histories of exchange between Indigenous and European people and the legacies of these interactions.

Argillite is a black, carbonaceous shale, which Haidas have sourced from a single quarry site at Slatechuck Creek (tllgaduu randlaay) near the Haida village of Skidegate (hllragilda 'llnagaay) since at least the early nineteenth century (see Map 2).² Though argillite formations occur elsewhere on Haida Gwaii, the geological processes by which the material was formed at Slatechuck makes it easily carved; its mineralogical components are silica, alumina, ferrous oxide and carbon.³ Haidas began to trade and sell argillite carvings to foreigners from at least the 1830s onward, and today it continues as a vibrant and versatile art form locally in Skidegate, in the

² Peter Macnair and Alan Hoover, *The Magic Leaves: A History of Argillite Carving* (Victoria: Royal British Columbia Museum, 2002), 11; Robin K. Wright, *Northern Haida Master Carvers* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 106.

³ For a more detailed overview of argillite's basic components, see Macnair and Hoover, *The Magic Leaves* (2002), 11.

northern Haida village of Old Massett (rad raci7waas) and at large in the urban centres of the contemporary Northwest Coast art market: Vancouver, Victoria and Seattle.⁴

The central argument of this thesis is that argillite carvings, though definable by their unique materiality and indivisible from particular contexts of production, collection and display, are unstable objects, their meanings mutable and historically contingent. In particular, I am concerned with the ways in which these objects have been understood and valued and how their statuses have changed as they have moved through different regimes of value.

An art tradition that began in the early nineteenth century, argillite carvings were created by Haida artists in a vibrant context of trade, travel and geopolitical upheaval. These artists were already trained in woodcarving and painting and they made objects that served the household, ceremonial and ritual needs of their villages.⁵ Europeans and Euro-Americans began to collect objects from Haidas and other Northwest Coast peoples through the early contact period in the late eighteenth

⁴ According to museum curator Karen Duffek (Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia), the market for contemporary Northwest Coast art remains “firmly centered” in the Pacific Northwest, whereas the market for historical works, particularly the oldest and most valuable, is based in the auction centers of New York and Toronto. Karen Duffek, “Value Added: The Northwest Coast Art Market since 1965,” in *Native Art of the Northwest Coast: A History of Changing Ideas*, eds. Charlotte Townsend-Gault, Jennifer Kramer and Ki-Ke-In (Vancouver, Toronto: UBC Press, 2013), 603.

⁵ Wright, *Northern Haida Master Carvers*, 106.

century, so the argillite trade that began circa the late 1820s or early 1830s emerged from a context of Indigenous-European exchange that by then had been established for five decades.⁶ Many of these objects, collected as curiosities, then found their way into the world's museum collections, including those in Scotland, where they were then, over decades and centuries, enfolded into shifting discourses around the value, status and meaning of objects.

Prior to being evaluated by anthropologists and art historians as objects of ethnography, craft or fine art, argillite carvings evoked curiosity among early and mid-nineteenth century collectors, who were mostly men who visited the Northwest Coast on trade, exploration or religious missions. Jonathan Green, the first Christian missionary to visit Haida Gwaii, is also the source of the first known documented observations of argillite carvings, which he saw at Skidegate in June 1829.⁷ “Their pipes, which they make of a kind of slate-stone,” he noted, “are curiously wrought.”⁸ The Skidegate Haidas, Green continued, were “fierce for trade, bringing for sale fish, fowls, eggs, and berries, and offering them in exchange for tobacco, knives, spoons,

⁶ See Wright, “The Early Contact Period, 1774 to 1799” in *Northern Haida Master Carvers*, 16-93. See also Mary Malloy, *Souvenirs of the Fur Trade: Northwest Coast Indian Art and Artifacts Collected by American Fur Traders, 1788-1844* (Cambridge, MA: Peabody Museum Press, Harvard University 2000).

⁷ Wright, *Northern Haida Master Carvers*, 96.

⁸ Jonathan Green, *Journal of a Tour on the North West Coast of America in the Year 1829* (New York City: Charles Fred. Heartman, 1915), 86.

carpenter's tools of various kinds, buttons and clothes. Many of these articles they have pilfered from other vessels.”⁹ Green's account of these familiar yet unfamiliar-looking objects, as well as the dynamic and unstable trading scene he encountered at Skidegate, describes what we might today call the “contact zone” of the early nineteenth century Northwest Coast.

The contact zone is a concept developed by Mary Louise Pratt to describe complex colonial social landscapes where “cultures [met], clash[ed] and grapple[d] with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power.”¹⁰ In the context of this thesis, this concept is a useful analytical tool to better understand the character and legacies of colonial structures and to identify the multiple agencies and power dynamics at work in colonizing spaces. The contact zone continues to be influential in art historical and anthropological studies that ascribe agency to colonized peoples through analysis of the production and circulation of Indigenous arts and material culture.¹¹ Aboriginal and European traders' cultivation of relationships with

⁹ Green, *Journal of a Tour*, 86.

¹⁰ Mary Louise Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone,” *Profession 91* (New York: MLA, 1991), 33-40. See also Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

¹¹ Ruth B. Phillips, *Trading Identities: The Souvenir in Native North American Art from the Northeast, 1700-1900* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press; Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998); Glass, *Objects of Exchange* (2011); Krmpotich and Peers, *This Is Our Life: Haida Material Heritage and Changing Museum Practice* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013).

each other at specific centers of exchange involved the negotiation and display of power through the giving and keeping of goods as well as through the exchange of language and shows of force.

The argillite collections of Robertson, Mitchell, Hector and Rae were assembled in the politically unstable and shifting contact zone of the early to mid-nineteenth century Northwest Coast. The early argillite pipes in Robertson's collection, for example, may have traveled from Haida Gwaii to Forts Vancouver and Langley, HBC posts respectively situated on the Columbia and Fraser rivers, in the late 1820s. HBC ship captain William Mitchell's collection of argillite ship pipes was likely made around the 1850s, and Mitchell could have collected these objects from Haida carvers himself on his travels to the west coast of Moresby Island, or at Forts Simpson or Victoria, the two major HBC posts in the 1840s and 1850s. The collections of Hector and Rae were assembled in yet a different political context when during the late 1850s and 60s both explorers visited Victoria at the end of British colonial exploring expeditions. As I will show in later chapters, mid-nineteenth century collectors' accounts of these objects (documented in collector's notes and object labels), as well as in the records that accounted for their entry into the museums' collections, refer to their curious qualities or to their value as specimens or scientific objects. Created as they were for trade or sale to non-Aboriginals, argillite

carvings have been interpreted historically as being not authentically Indigenous. Again, recognizing the mutability rather than fixity of these objects, which are products of intercultural interactions, challenges, as art historian Kathryn Bunn-Marcuse observes, “outdated binary [labels] of primitive/civilized, classical/aculturated, traditional/non-traditional.” Historical examination of the complex histories of argillite carvings shows them to be “Haida art with forms inspired by Haida experience.”¹² Complementing art historians’ formal and stylistic analyses of Haida art (summarized below), theorists of material culture, as I will discuss, provide tools to unpack notions of the in/authentic, the mutable and the intercultural. These are concepts that I use to characterize argillite throughout this thesis.

Drawing from historical research at Canadian and British archives and Scottish museums, the thesis also uses these four argillite collections as a backdrop to investigate the tensions that museums and source communities must now negotiate around the histories of acquisition (for museums) and loss (for Indigenous communities). Indeed, the notion that these works may embody “shared histories” between Europeans and Haidas is contestable on Haida Gwaii where some – but not

¹² Kathryn Bunn-Marcuse, “Eagles and Elephants,” in *Charles Edenshaw*, eds. Robin K. Wright and Daina Augaitis, with Robert Davidson and James Hart (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2013), 182.

all – Haida carvers and experts suggest that the European side to the story is less important, if not irrelevant to how they conceive of the carvings’ value as Haida documents and material heritage.¹³ As I discuss in Chapter 5 for example, my interactions with Haida carvers provoked a range of responses among them to the in/authenticity of ship panel pipes, which incorporate European imagery, as “Haida” objects. As Michael Rowlands points out, though the idea of heritage “implies a common possession,” of space, place and identity, it is constructed as much through conflict as through consensus.¹⁴ Furthermore, Haida peoples’ relationships to these things have been shaped by different post-colonial experiences than those of non-Indigenous people, a point raised in my interactions with carvers in Vancouver and on Haida Gwaii, as I also discuss in Chapter 5. Though the carvings may now rest in museums (some are on display, others are in storage), exchange between Haidas and Europeans around these and other objects of Haida cultural heritage continues. The central aim of this thesis is to show how the meanings of argillite carvings are

¹³ In their discussion of the acquisition and exhibition of a Nuu-chah-nulth ceremonial curtain, Hoover and Inglis note how the Royal British Columbia Museum and the Nuu-chah-nulth families with whom the Museum consulted “do not share the same concepts of history.” Alan L. Hoover and Richard Inglis, “Acquiring and Exhibiting a Nuu-chah-nulth Ceremonial Curtain,” *Curator: The Museum Journal* 4 (33) (1990), 285-286, quoted in Martha Black, “Collaborations: a Historical Perspective,” in *Native Art of the Northwest Coast*, 810.

¹⁴ Michael Rowlands, “Heritage and Cultural Property,” in *The Material Culture Reader*, ed. Victor Buchli (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2002), 106.

historically contingent, with complex legacies stemming from histories of trade and collection in the colonial periphery, and representation and display in the imperial centre.

This thesis is mainly a history of Haida argillite collections acquired by Scottish men engaged in trade and exploration in North America. It therefore uses standard historical methods, including textual and visual document analysis carried out in the collections of museums, libraries and archives to chart histories of the display, acquisition and collection of argillite carving. The thesis is also about objects and their enduring roles in historical and contemporary relationships between Indigenous people and Europeans. Submitted for a PhD in Canadian Studies, this study is methodologically and conceptually interdisciplinary. It draws from art historical scholarship to comment (if infrequently) upon the iconography, meaning and chronology of the objects. It also draws from material culture theory to determine the ways in which argillite carvings have (or have not) been invested with value and meaning through their careers as museum artefacts and documents of Haida cultural history.

This project was initially inspired, methodologically and in spirit, by my own experiences working alongside curators in the Ethnology department of the former Canadian Museum of Civilization. The curators' longstanding and ongoing

engagements with First Nations community members around important historical Indigenous collections motivated my pursuit of graduate studies in this field. I chose to orient my research around British museum collections, which, as a result of Britain's imperial expansion in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, are often older than those in North America. UK collections were formed through cultures of collecting that emerged from developments in exploration, commerce, religious missionization, ethnology, tourism and anthropology.

Important work carried out recently by Canadian and UK scholars with Indigenous source communities and museum collections laid methodological groundwork for this research. This thesis took particular inspiration from Brown and Wachowich's *Material Histories* project at the University of Aberdeen (2008) for example. *Material Histories* used artefacts to think about the experiences of Scots and Indigenous peoples over four centuries of fur trade relations in North America.¹⁵ As such, in addition to literatures from the fields of history, art history and anthropology, this thesis draws from scholarship by North American and UK scholars in a number of (expanding) fields. As I discuss further in my literature review and methodology sections, important contributions have been made to the fields of critical fur trade

¹⁵ Alison K. Brown and Nancy Wachowich, *Material Histories: Scots and Aboriginal Peoples in the Canadian Fur Trade*, accessed 2 July 2015, <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/materialhistories/people.php?id=10>.

history (A.K. Brown 2009, J.S.H. Brown and Vibert 2000, Clayton 2009, Peers 1999), the relationships between scholars/museums and Indigenous source communities (Krmpotich 2010, Peers and Brown 2003, Krmpotich and Peers 2013), and to collectors of historical ethnographic material and its display in museums (Coombes 1988, 2006, O'Hanlon and Welsch 2000, Welsch 2000, Thomas 1999). More broadly, several scholars have worked to expand the field of history to include visual and material culture as indispensable evidence of historical processes (Auslander 2005, Auslander et al. 2009, Cangany 2012, Fowkes Tobin 1999, Thatcher Ulrich 2001, Trentmann 2009, White 2013). Finally, the growing field of material culture studies continues to generate new insights into the character and value of things and the dynamic relationships between people and objects (Buchli 2002, Coltman 2015, Gerritsen and Riello 2015, Ingold 2007, McAleer 2015, Mintz 1985, Miller 1987, 2008, 2010, Rowlands 2002). Below, I show how this literature has informed and supported the concepts and methods of this thesis. First, I provide a brief historiography of argillite carving.

1.2 Studies of argillite carving

Though the formal art history of argillite carving was developed in the second half of the twentieth century, since Jonathan Green's 1829 observations of argillite pipes at Skidegate, a trail of commentary has been left by earlier observers who described the

striking appearance of these works in missionary journals, travel accounts, colonial correspondence and scientific reports. While these accounts are partial and fragmentary, they document an early souvenir trade that captured Euro-American visitors before the tourism industry developed on the Northwest Coast in the 1880s.¹⁶ The anthropologist Charles Marius Barbeau of the National Museum of Canada published the first scholarly monographs on the tradition, *Haida Myths: Illustrated in Argillite Carvings* (1953) and *Haida Carvers in Argillite* (1957).¹⁷ Though some of Barbeau's observations have been discredited over issues of misattribution and historical inaccuracies, his ambivalence towards argillite's value as an authentic Haida art is significant in the context of this thesis as it alludes to my central problematic, the transcultural and mutable character of these carvings.¹⁸

Barbeau's work and the work of subsequent scholars has been mostly concerned with identifying the meanings of these objects through analysis of their functions (what they were used for) and their form (what they represent). In so doing, and in debating the origins and chronology of argillite carving, the scholarship has

¹⁶ Glass, ed. *Objects of Exchange*, 18.

¹⁷ Charles Marius Barbeau, *Haida Myths: Illustrated in Argillite Carvings* (Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, 1953); Charles Marius Barbeau, *Haida Carvers in Argillite* (Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, 1957).

¹⁸ According to Pratt, "transculturation" is a "phenomenon of the contact zone." It is a process that describes how marginalized groups have selected and innovated from materials passed on to them by the dominant culture. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 9.

fixed these objects into art historical and anthropological categories, whereas this thesis takes a different approach. Rather than analyzing these objects art-historically, I trace the historical contingency of argillite carvings and the various ways they have been made into meaningful objects.¹⁹ I do this by examining their contexts of production, collection and display, which form the focus of chapters 3, 4 and 2, respectively. How contemporary Haidas re-enfold these objects into the stories they tell of themselves and their communities is the focus of Chapter 5.

The art history and anthropology of argillite carving has developed significantly with the contributions of a few key scholars since Barbeau's monographs of the 1950s. Art historian Robin K. Wright has made the most substantial contributions to our understanding of this art form. For example, Wright discovered that argillite pipes were the first major iteration of the carving tradition, citing documented examples in museum collections dating to circa the 1820s.²⁰ Wright's

¹⁹ Bunn-Marcuse points out that although in the past few decades the study of Northwest Coast art has experienced a turn away from formal analysis towards a "broader cultural and historical contextualization of artworks," formal analysis is a "critical first step in any examination of artwork." Basic questions such as what an object is, its provenance, and if possible, who made it and when, "must be answered to understand an object as a social, cultural, or commercial production. Artwork cannot be approached at a theoretical level until it is historically situated." Some, but not all, the works investigated in this thesis are approached from a formal perspective. Bunn-Marcuse, "Form First, Function Follows: The Use of Formal Analysis in Northwest Coast Art History," in *Native Art of the Northwest Coast*, 404.

²⁰ Robin K. Wright, "Haida Argillite Pipes" (MA diss., University of Washington, 1977).

early work addressed Barbeau's claims on the origins of argillite carving, a debate that we can trace through the literature with the contributions of Kaufmann (1969), Drew and Wilson (1981), Sheehan (1981) and Macnair and Hoover (1984, 2002). Its commercial origins, which Barbeau acknowledged in his preface to *Haida Myths*, has fed into debates about argillite's authenticity as a Haida art, an issue I briefly address below.

Though the following scholarly contributions have advanced our understanding of the development of argillite carvings through art historical analyses, they have been less concerned with tracing their changing status through various regimes of value. This is because approaching the social lives of Indigenous art and material culture from various regions is a theoretical concern that emerged in the 1990s. Some examples from the North American context include Phillips (1998), who investigated intercultural interactions between Native peoples and Europeans through the development and circulation of Eastern Woodlands Indigenous tourist arts. Glass and his colleagues (2011) have explored the diverse contexts in which late-nineteenth century Northwest Coast arts circulated during the modernization of that region, and the uses to which various objects were put. Following the movement of objects through regimes of value is key to understanding how things are made meaningful,

and further in this introduction I outline some of the key concepts in support of this framework from the field of material culture studies.

In *Haida Myths* (1953), Barbeau introduced argillite carving as a derivative and commercial art form:

The Haida, who ventured to imitate the Boston whalers by scrimshawing walrus tusks and whales' teeth for a pastime, soon surpassed his white masters in the art of carving on his own. *For he was not born to remain an imitator.* Shedding the fetters of foreign ties, he adopted argillite and wood as his preferred media of plastic expression and chose to illustrate his native tales and mythology. In this virgin field he has immortalized himself on the high levels of universal art.²¹

In this passage, Barbeau argues that though argillite carving may have begun as an art form derived from scrimshaw (a whaler's pastime whereby the bones of marine mammals were carved or engraved with whaling and maritime imagery), the Haida artists' turn to "native" subject matter (i.e. the Haida histories and stories inscribed on model totem poles, platters and miniature boxes in the later decades of the nineteenth century), qualify argillite as a unique contribution to world art traditions, despite its commercial and supposedly borrowed origins.²² As Wright has shown, however, argillite was not derived from scrimshaw because American whalers were not yet hunting on the Northwest Coast at the time argillite pipes were first documented by

²¹ Barbeau, *Haida Myths*, x. My emphasis.

²² Ibid., v, vii, viii.

Green in Skidegate in 1829.²³ Wright's analysis of several hundred documented argillite pipes found in public and private collections showed instead that the pipe form, upon which figures from Haida stories and mythology were carved, was the first major iteration of argillite carving.²⁴

Having identified the origins of this tradition, Wright developed an argument for argillite's authenticity (a debate that Barbeau ambivalently introduced in the 1950s) by promoting it as a uniquely Haida art form (1979, 1980, 1982, 1986). For example, regarding the floral designs that Haida carvers applied to argillite clay-style trade pipes, she writes that artists "built on Western forms but [that] the results were uniquely Haida in style."²⁵ Making a similar argument about the innovative ways that Haidas interpreted and applied Euro-American ship imagery to argillite pipes from the 1830s to 50s, Wright argues that the ship pipes (e.g. Figure 1) were "a highly original art form which was simultaneously a desirable trade object."²⁶

²³ Robin K. Wright, "Haida Argillite Pipes: the Influence of Clay Pipes," *American Indian Art Magazine* 5 (4) (Autumn 1980): 88.

²⁴ Wright, "Haida Argillite Pipes" (1977).

²⁴ Barbeau, *Haida Myths* (1953), x. My emphasis.

²⁵ Wright, "Haida Argillite Pipes" (1980), 45.

²⁶ Robin K. Wright, "Haida Argillite Ship Pipes," *American Indian Art Magazine* 5 (1) (Winter 1979), 47.



Figure 1. Argillite ship pipe

National Museum of Scotland

A.1906.459

21.3 cm x 8.9 cm

Image © and courtesy National Museums Scotland

And finally, regarding the tradition's commercial origins, Wright holds that "it is not necessary to deny the 'tourist art' origins of argillite carvings in order to give them recognition as a respectable art form." Rather, "it is necessary to acknowledge these origins in order to give the Haida artists the credit they are due."²⁷

Framing argillite carving (and other intercultural arts such as Haida silver jewelry) as an artistic manifestation of Haida economic acumen and agency through times of social and cultural upheaval is now part of informed conversation around Northwest Coast arts. For example, art historian Kathryn Bunn-Marcuse interprets the range of imagery that Haida artist Charles Edenshaw (c. 1839-1920) created in his works of argillite and silver:

²⁷ Robin K. Wright, "Haida Argillite Carved for Sale," *American Indian Art Magazine* 8 (1) (Winter 1982), 48.

[When] Euro-American imagery is used to advance Indigenous meaning...it becomes Indigenous. [Such] works are all Haida art with forms inspired by Haida experience. Otherwise, the categorization of imagery supports outdated binary choices of primitive/civilized, classical/acculturated, traditional/non-traditional – categories that continue to plague Indigenous artists today who produce contemporary art and whose subject matter or form of expression instead blurs the often problematic and overlapping categories of craft, fine art, traditional, alternative and avant-garde.²⁸

Still, while they can be problematic, the categories that art historians and anthropologists have developed to make sense of argillite carvings enable us to understand the objects, and the carving tradition, through a more focused historical lens. Formal analysis, as Bunn-Marcuse argues, is a critical first step towards situating any object in time and place (see f.n. 17 of this thesis). In addition to Wright, contributions from Kaufmann (1969), Drew and Wilson (1981), Sheehan (1981) and Macnair and Hoover (1984, 2002) have grouped the various iterations into named categories, to, as Sheehan states, put “argillite art into a shape in time.”²⁹ This thesis draws on these categories to name and identify particular argillite types (e.g. “ceremonial pipe form,” “ship panel pipe” and “Western tableware”) and their approximate time periods, but as noted, is concerned not so much with fitting the objects into fixed art historical categories as with tracing their movement through the

²⁸ Bunn Marcuse, “Eagles and Elephants,” in *Charles Edenshaw*, 182.

²⁹ Carol Sheehan, *Pipes That Won't Smoke, Coals That Won't Burn* (Calgary and Winnipeg: Glenbow Museum, 1981), 15-27.

contexts of production, collection and display.³⁰ The following discussion outlines a conceptual framework through which we might trace the changing status of these pieces as they have circulated through the contexts noted above, and, moreover, to show how they have been entangled in the shifting and dynamic relationships between Europeans and Northwest Coast Indigenous people.

1.3 *Authenticity and history of commoditized arts and their entanglement in global exchange systems*

The ambivalent status accorded to argillite carvings through the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was, as noted, apparent in Barbeau's writings of the 1950s. It was not until the 1970s that art historians and anthropologists would begin to promote commoditized Indigenous arts as being both unique (i.e. authentic) expressions of cultural identity and evidence of Indigenous entanglement and agency in global exchange systems. Nelson Graburn's edited volume, *Ethnic and Tourist Arts: Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World* (1976) was, as Phillips and Steiner point out, "the first major publication to pay serious scholarly attention to the art commodities of marginalized and colonized peoples and to recognize their importance in the touristic production of ethnicity."³¹ In that volume, Kaufmann's chapter (though perpetuating

³⁰ Macnair and Hoover, *The Magic Leaves* (2002), 21.

³¹ Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher Steiner, *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1999), 4.

the myth that the material was discovered by Euro-Americans), framed argillite as an early “tourist” art, both commercially successful and integral to expressions of the cultural identity of modern Haida.³² The idea that commoditization can be an authenticating act is central to more recent analyses of the various contexts in which Indigenous art has circulated in the twentieth and twenty-first century (Ferry 2002, Kramer 2006, Phillips and Steiner 1999, Roth 2015).

Recent exhibitions in Canadian and UK museums and art galleries have also promoted argillite carving as a uniquely Haida art while engaging with the market forces through which the tradition emerged and flourished. In the catalogue for the exhibition *Raven Travelling: Two Centuries of Haida Art* (Vancouver Art Gallery 2006), artist Marianne Jones positions argillite carving as one of several Haida art forms created through the Haida’s talent for “adapting new materials into traditional forms.” Such adaptations were “responses to circumstance and are today considered to be in the traditional realm.”³³ Similarly, contributors to the catalogue of the *Charles*

³² Carol Kaufmann, “Functional Aspects of Haida Argillite Carvings,” in *Ethnic and Tourist Arts: Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World*, ed. Nelson H.H. Graburn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 56-69. See also Vaughan and Holm, *Soft Gold: The Fur Trade and Cultural Exchange on the Northwest Coast of North America* (Portland: Oregon Historical Press, 1982).

³³ Marianne Jones, “Haida Art and Haida Gwaii,” in *Raven Travelling: Two Centuries of Haida Art*, ed. Daina Augaitis (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery; Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre; Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 38.

Edenshaw exhibition (Vancouver Art Gallery, National Gallery of Canada, 2014), point out that certain compositional and formal innovations in late-nineteenth century Haida art can be linked to the tastes of the new kinds of customers for whom Haida artists produced work, such as anthropologists and tourists. Edenshaw, notes Alan Hoover, who was “a full-time artist producing for the outside market...was of necessity sensitive to the likes and dislikes of his customers.”³⁴ As Northwest Coast art curator Bill McLennan observed, Edenshaw produced work that was “simultaneously ethnographic, contemporary and commercially viable.”³⁵

The productivity of Haida artists, and the intensity of ethnographic collecting in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, contributed to the creation of far-flung collections of Northwest Coast material culture in the world’s museums. Beyond the context of the historical Northwest Coast, much scholarship has been done since the 1980s on collectors of historical ethnographic material and its display in museums. In Britain, Coombes (1988, 2006), O’Hanlon and Welsch (2000), Stocking (1985, 1987) and Thomas (1991, 1994, 1999) have explored the complex processes that shaped the character of ethnographic collecting in the nineteenth and early twentieth

³⁴ Alan L. Hoover, “Charles Edenshaw and the Development of Narrative Structure in Nineteenth Century Haida Art,” in *Charles Edenshaw*, 69.

³⁵ Bill McLennan and Karen Duffek, *The Transforming Image: Painted Arts of the North Pacific Coast First Nations* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 40-41, quoted in Jonaitis, “A ‘Novel and Modern’ Artist: Charles Edenshaw,” in *Charles Edenshaw*, 195.

century. Addressing different Indigenous peoples (and material cultures) and colonial/imperial collecting paradigms in Africa and the Pacific, these authors situate collecting as specific historical encounters between Indigenous and European individuals who mutually pursued their own agendas. Looking at the particularity of such encounters, as Thomas (1991, 1994) and O’Hanlon and Welsch (2000) point out for example, reveals the agency of Indigenous peoples in colonial-era exchanges and challenges European narratives about colonial dominance: “collections and their contents are not everywhere the product of the unalloyed will and buying power of White collectors...To suppose that they are threatens a fresh subjugation in over-writing local capacities to influence the terms of interaction and the content of collections.”³⁶ This thesis also emphasizes the commercial aspect of the argillite carving tradition in order to highlight the agency of historical Haida artists in nineteenth century global exchange systems.

Recognizing the uneven ways that colonial collections were acquired and valued has in turn influenced the ways that historical ethnographic material gets displayed in contemporary Western museum displays. Scholars who address this “reflexive turn” in museum ethnography, to name just a few recent examples, include

³⁶ Michael O’Hanlon and Robert Louis Welsch, *Hunting the Gatherers: Ethnographic Collectors, Agents and Agency in Melanesia, 1870s-1930s* (Vol. 6) (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), 15.

Bouquet (2012), Coombes (1988, 2006), Phillips (2011) and Sleeper-Smith (2009).

Central to this scholarship is the historicization of Indigenous art and material culture, the rejection of the notion of Indigenous cultures as “timeless” and a recent focus on the particular circumstances of individual encounters between Native peoples and newcomers. Drawing from this scholarship, this thesis situates the four argillite collections at – where possible – specific places in time to reveal the character of the social, cultural and political relationships between Haidas and the collectors of their art.

While Indigenous arts have begun to be framed (art) historically, so material culture and visual resources have begun to be used by historians to illustrate colonial intercultural relations. The inclusion of objects as documents is a relatively recent development in historical studies. From an art historical perspective, Jacknis comments that, “to form a [more] complete picture of the [European-Indigenous] encounter, it is necessary to consult an array of overlapping sources – a standard art historical method.”³⁷ This thesis uses information from colonial and museum archives and presents Haida argillite carvings as among other kinds of things, documents of Haida history and of the shared and contested histories between Haidas and Europeans. It recognizes the limitations of conventional (i.e. textual) archives and

³⁷ Jacknis, “From Explorers to Ethnographers,” in *Native Art of the Northwest Coast*, 50.

presents material culture as evidence of colonial processes in Canadian history.³⁸

Anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler promotes an ethnographic approach to archival research, meaning that content is read for its form and context. Students of colonialism, she writes, are increasingly “rereading colonial archives...with photography, engravings and documentary art.” Reading “against the grain” of the archive, one may understand archives as sites of knowledge production, their objects as “documents of exclusion and as monuments to particular configurations of power.”³⁹ My reading of archival documents in the Scottish museums and Canadian archives was motivated by the need to collect empirical data about the people and things relevant to the collections, and also to gain a sense of the personal, social and political dynamics at work on the mid-nineteenth century Northwest Coast. Stoler seeks to expand the idea of the archive by including other kinds of documents, and by showing how and where knowledge and power are produced through textual and material records. The knowledge I gleaned from the HBCA archives regarding the

³⁸ For theoretical insights into the use of objects as documents, see Susan Pearce, *On Collecting: An investigation into collecting in the European tradition* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995) and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Reflections,” in *The Empire of Things*, 257-268. Studies that have approached First Nations material culture as historical documents include Phillips, *Trading Identities*, and Stacey Loyer, “Belonging and Belongings: Ethnographic Collecting and Indigenous Agency at the Six Nations of the Grand River” (PhD diss., Carleton University, 2013).

³⁹ Ann Laura Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance,” *Archival Science* 2 (2002): 89, 90, 109.

formation of the Canadian social and political landscape for example, was contested in my conversations with Haidas.⁴⁰

In the early 1980s, Native American historian Donald Fixico critiqued the exclusionary character of Euro-American colonial archives while highlighting the documentary value of visual material. Generally absent from textual archives, Fixico wrote, is any meaningful sense of Native American experiences as their oral histories have often been mistranslated, misrepresented or altogether excluded from official records. Oral history, Fixico argued, adds another dimension to the work of remembering the character of human experience because in retelling events and calling forth the “emotions and intensity exhibited during [for example] treaty-making, battles, and the telling of stories that vividly described native leaders and their peoples,” the events told are relived and remembered.⁴¹ However, access to oral histories as an historical method can be limited depending on the scope of the project. Certain stories may be restricted to outsiders (as I was told following my slide presentation in Skidegate), or there may simply be no living knowledge attached to

⁴⁰ One interlocutor, for example, encouraged me to read Tom Swanky’s book *The True Story of Canada’s ‘War’ of Extermination on the Pacific* (2012), in which the author alleges that the government of James Douglas, fur trader-turned governor of Vancouver Island, engaged in the deliberate spread of smallpox among Aboriginal people as a form of genocide in order to clear land for settlers.

⁴¹ Donald Fixico, “The Native American Researcher: Another View of Historical Documents,” *The Midwestern Archivist*, 8(2) (1983): 10.

particular events or objects. Though my interlocutors had much to say about their own histories and experiences with argillite carving in their communities, my research did not so much elicit specific oral histories on particular objects in Scottish collections, given their age and centuries of physical separation from Haida Gwaii. I discuss these issues in further detail in Chapter 5.

Fixico also counted as historical witnesses the methods of “visual education” through which elders have taught youth. Basket making, woodcarving and other media doubled as historical documents of Native American experience and history. As oral cultures, Fixico credited pictographs, hide paintings, wampum belts and other artwork for “documenting the Indian version of history.”⁴² Oral history and visual documents can and should be used alongside written documents to supplement Indigenous and Euro-American histories and their intersections.⁴³ Promoting the idea of the “shared” historical experience of Native Americans and settlers, Fixico argued that weaving Indigenous accounts into Euro-North American narratives will “yield a truer historiography and present a more accurate explanation of American history.”⁴⁴ There has been a recent spate of works in this vein.

⁴² Fixico, “The Native American Researcher,” 7.

⁴³ Ibid., 11-12.

⁴⁴ Fixico, “The Native American Researcher,” 12.

1.4 History's "material turn" and critical fur trade histories

In her book *The Age of Homespun* (2001) historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich used objects to illustrate the lived experiences of ordinary people in the Eastern U.S. The multiple histories of early/colonial America (feminist, Indigenous or otherwise), argues Ulrich, *require* an engagement with objects, which are valuable for their capacity to tell stories beyond the dominant narratives.⁴⁵ Disrupting the authority of textual sources – a strategy to expand the field of history to test old questions and ask new ones – is also an objective common to the work of Auslander (2005), Trentmann (2009) and Cangany (2012).⁴⁶ For Auslander, material culture is “another vital source of historical knowledge supplemental to words for those who have little access to them.”⁴⁷ Indeed, as Krmpotich and Peers have observed, artifact collections (for museums) and material heritage (for Indigenous people) are like archives. On the one hand, museum collections “show where British people have been and what they have thought about the peoples they found there.” For Haidas, and for “the many other societies whose historic treasures are housed in UK museums, objects are also

⁴⁵ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001).

⁴⁶ Trentmann for example writes that material culture has the capacity “both to provide new perspectives on classic questions and to open new domains to historical analysis.” See “Materiality in the future of history: things, practices and politics,” *Journal of British Studies* 48 (2009): 1044.

⁴⁷ Leora Auslander, “Beyond Words,” *American Historical Review* 119 (4) (2005): 1018.

archives: of histories, relationships with outsiders, survival of colonial regimes, and genealogies.”⁴⁸ Haida curator Nika Collison has pointed out that Haidas’ oral culture has long been documented in their art – the Haida’s visual language. The information that can be “gleaned from the carvings, songs and stories created by the Haida artists of [the historical] era,” Collison writes, “is on par with the written records, paintings, sketches and photos left by the British, Russian, Spanish, French and American explorers and traders of the day.”⁴⁹ Indeed, as I point out with the statement of Haida culture expert Captain Gold in Chapter 1 of this thesis, Indigenous historians use objects of material heritage to construct different narratives than those known to mainstream society.

There has, furthermore, been much recent critical work on Canadian fur trade histories that have positioned Indigenous-trader relations at the forefront of the political and social relationships that were developed at the trading posts and along trade routes in early Canada. Many of these studies, including contributions by A.K.

⁴⁸ Cara Krmpotich and Laura Peers, *This is Our Life: Haida Material Heritage and Changing Museum Practice* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 9, 16.

⁴⁹ Nika Collison, “Everything Depends on Everything Else,” in *Raven Travelling*, 57-65. Other recent works using objects to illustrate new histories of colonial intercultural relations include Catherine Cangany’s “Fashioning Moccasins: Detroit, the Manufacturing Frontier and the Empire of Consumption, 1701-1835,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 69 (2) (2012): 265-304; Beth Fowkes Tobin’s *Picturing Imperial Power: Colonial Subjects in Eighteenth-Century British Painting* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999); Sophie White’s *Wild Frenchmen and Frenchified Indians: Material Culture and Race in Colonial Louisiana* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

Brown and Wachowich (2008), A.K. Brown (2009), J.S.H. Brown and Vibert (2009) and Peers (1999, 2007), use material culture to document and interpret those stories. These scholars, who have mostly focused on Western Canadian fur trade histories, have also shown that the work of constructing Indigenous-European trade histories is painstaking, multi-sited and time-consuming. Research in national and international archives and museums requires much time to recover and analyze the material, as does developing relationships with Aboriginal knowledge-holders that are meaningful and mutually beneficial. The results of such work are valuable for their potential to enrich our understanding of the past and the processes by which “truth” is constructed. The “quest for the ‘correct’ version of a story,” Brown and Vibert point out, “may be less interesting than the rich information that each account reveals about the social processes in which it is embedded.” The exercise of history is “not so much to straighten out the ‘facts,’ but to understand how different ways of knowing generate distinct analyses of social processes and distinct interpretations of events.” Each interpretation of past events will contain grains of truth and insights into the perspectives of different historical actors.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Jennifer S.H. Brown and Elizabeth Vibert, “Introduction,” in *Reading Beyond Words: Contexts for Native History* (Second Edition), eds. Jennifer S.H. Brown and Elizabeth Vibert (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), xxii.

In addition to their historical significance, objects and archives hold political significance for Indigenous people in today's nation-state. Elizabeth Edwards has remarked that archives and museums are sites that are now "becoming not only places of exclusion and disappearance but also spaces of contested histories and contesting practices, negotiation, restatement and repossession."⁵¹ Fixico's call for Native Americans to use the "white man's" archives is informed by tribes' requirement to prove tribal identities for federal recognition. In their land claims, Canadian First Nations claimants and researchers must also make use of the "official" record to prove their historical and ongoing use of lands and resources. In this thesis, I argue that the Euro-Canadian record of historical Indigenous-European relations must be continually tested and expanded with Indigenous oral and visual materials to understand a truer, if more complicated account of what we call Canadian history.⁵²

1.5 *Theorizing objects in motion*

This thesis traces the movement of a particular kind of object – argillite carvings – through various social and geographical landscapes at various points in time. As noted,

⁵¹ Elizabeth Edwards, "Introduction" to "Part 2: Talking Visual Histories," in *Museums and Source Communities, A Routledge Reader*, eds. Laura Peers and Alison Brown (New York: Routledge, 2003), 83.

⁵² Glass has commented that complicating conventional historical narratives (and categories for organizing knowledge) gives us "a far richer...and more accurate view into the historical reality of indigenous life [in historical times] and perhaps even today." *Objects of Exchange*, 28.

in order to understand the multiple registers on which objects are valued, art historians and anthropologists are now paying greater attention to the historical circumstances in which they were collected. The “trajectories” and “biographies” of objects are concepts that emerged in the 1980s, with the development of the field of material culture studies, as frameworks to investigate the ways in which the relationships between people and things are co-constitutive (Appadurai 1986, Miller 2008, 2010, Mintz 1985). The use of material culture as evidence in the task of tracing historical processes has bridged disciplines in the humanities and social sciences. As noted earlier, historians are increasingly using objects in their analyses of the past, and anthropologists meanwhile have begun to devote more attention to the historicization of objects. The following discussion briefly outlines the value of material culture studies to this thesis, highlighting why it is useful to trace the biographies and movements of objects and commodities as they change hands and how they are used to construct identities and notions of cultural heritage. As Gerritsen and Riello point out, objects are “the tools through which people shape their lives.”⁵³

In 1985, Sidney Mintz’s *Sweetness and Power* traced the rise of sugar consumption in modern Europe to show how this “ordinary commodity” revealed the

⁵³ Anne Gerritsen and Giorgio Riello, “Introduction: Writing Material Culture History,” in *Writing Material Culture History*, eds. Gerritsen and Riello (London, Oxford, New York, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2015), 2.

complex global power structures circumscribing its respective production and consumption in the New and Old Worlds. Mintz showed that by “following” commodities we find underlying power structures, which determine the ways in which products shape the lives of the people who use them. Viewed through this “follow the commodity” lens, the proliferation of monumental carving on the nineteenth century Northwest Coast, for example, could be explained in part by the introduction – and ready availability – of European iron tools to improve and expedite the carving process. Though an increase in wealth and monumental art – effects of the fur trade – would enhance for a time the prestige and status of high-ranking individuals in northern Native villages, Northwest Coast societies would become increasingly entangled with all aspects of colonial power structures, both constructive and destructive. The Haida, as has been recorded in HBC ledger books, demanded commodities such as molasses, blankets, guns and tools, objects that they used for sustenance, shelter and social mobility. On the flip side, engagement with Euro-North American society had devastating consequences, most obviously in the form of epidemics. As scholars have shown, argillite carving only proliferated in the 1820s when the Haidas’ most valuable commodity prior to then – sea otter furs – were hunted to near extinction. Having benefitted from the trade of those furs, argillite was made and traded to replace lost wealth, showing how so-called “remote” Indigenous

communities were, from the beginning of Indigenous-European relations in that region, deeply involved in global exchange systems.

Nearly a century of anthropological scholarship has expanded and deepened our understanding of the dynamics of human relationships by bringing into focus the movement of objects through social landscapes. In *The Gift* (1924, 1954), Mauss highlighted the dynamics of giving and receiving; this work directly influenced the exchange theorists discussed below. By showing how gifting is a moral act that solidifies social bonds between giver and receiver, but also that it is a competitive and strategic act – with reference to the Northwest Coast potlatch – Mauss problematized the division between gifts and commodities, categories traditionally respectively associated with moral and capitalist exchange.⁵⁴ The relevance of this conventional dichotomy decreased once it was understood that “the processes of social exchange within any one culture (or even between cultures) can transform the status of an item.”⁵⁵ Stemming in part from Mauss’s work, Appadurai’s and Kopytoff’s theories of how the meanings of objects change through their careers (1986) were major contributions in the field of material culture studies and as I discuss below, they

⁵⁴ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (WW Norton & Company, 1954).

⁵⁵ Alan Barnard and Jonathan Spencer, eds., *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology* (Second Edition) (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2012), 443.

support the arguments and methodology of this thesis. First, however, I will make a few comments regarding how objects created as commodities may now evoke a sense of ownership by the descendants of originating societies, and how in this light, argillite carving can be seen as a particularly problematic kind of object.

Annette Weiner (1992) drew on Mauss's insights into the relationship between acts of reciprocity, the formation of social bonds and the creation of social difference by examining "alienable" and "inalienable" categories of property. Mauss described the latter category of objects in terms of their ability to be exchanged and circulated, but never fully divested of their association and meaning to the original owner. In *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping While Giving* (1992), Weiner argued that the inalienability of a possession lies in its history of ownership. The history of the inalienable object is authenticated by "fictive or true genealogies, origin myths" and sacred ancestors, among other things.⁵⁶ An inalienable object, Weiner continued, is a stabilizing force against change, "because its presence authenticates cosmological origins, kinship, and political histories."⁵⁷

As I show in Chapter 5, Weiner's insights elucidate the attitudes of some contemporary Haida artists towards the value and meaning of argillite carving. Though

⁵⁶ Annette Weiner. *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 33.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 9.

these things now in public and private collections were made by nineteenth-century Haida artists to be sold and exchanged to Europeans, some (but not all) Haidas see these objects as representing loss of knowledge and disconnection from Haida family and community histories. In my fieldwork interactions, this sense of loss was articulated especially against Haidas' views of the legacies of nineteenth and early twentieth century anthropological collecting on the Northwest Coast, a problematic history with which many Northwest Coast Indigenous communities are familiar.⁵⁸ That some Haida people today might view historical argillite carvings as displaced objects of high cultural and historical value poses an interesting question for contemporary understandings of the ownership of objects and cultural patrimony, a discussion I take up in Chapter 5.

As anthropologist Michael Rowlands points out, concepts of heritage, cultural patrimony and tradition are also grounded in the concern to create identities and feelings of belonging.⁵⁹ Heritage in particular, Rowlands argues (from Benjamin 1977), is linked to a longing for authenticity in an “estranged” modern present. It is

⁵⁸ For histories of this collecting, see Douglas Cole, *Captured Heritage: The Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985); Sandra Dyck, “‘These things are our totems’: Marius Barbeau and the indigenization of Canadian art and culture in the 1920s” (MA diss, Carleton University, 1995); Ronald W. Hawker, *Tales of Ghosts: First Nations Art in British Columbia, 1922-61* (Toronto, Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003).

⁵⁹ Michael Rowlands, “Heritage and Cultural Property,” in *The Material Culture Reader*, ed. Victor Buchli (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2002), 105.

“infused by a sense of melancholia and grief for lost objects and lost sense of identity.”⁶⁰ Such a sense of loss is particularly strong for the Haida, who were encouraged to suppress their cultural and social identity by missionaries and government agents who were religious, political and social representatives of the colonial state. It is understandable then, that argillite carvings, which tell or refer to Haida stories and history, are, in addition to being art commodities, part of the continuum of material heritage documents of which Haidas seek the return. “A tradition is never neutral,” Rowlands argues, “but is created by an aesthetic relationship between objects, memories and stories which can transmit to future generations a sense of dignity, self-respect and a right to have a future.” As I show in Chapter 5, historical argillite carvings like those in the Scottish museum collections have personal, social, cultural and political value to contemporary Haidas.

As objects carved from a material quarried on land to which Haidas claim exclusive rights, argillite carvings may be understood, in a sense, as “inalienable commodities.” This is a recent concept that anthropologists have used to describe Indigenous makers/artists’ attitudes towards material that they work into trade objects but that retain an inalienable connection to the original makers as objects of ongoing

⁶⁰ Ibid., 106.

cultural and historical importance.⁶¹ As I will show in Chapter 5, “argillite carving” (encompassing raw material, art practice and made object), once considered a “purely commercial” art (Barbeau 1957), is actually seen to have inalienable properties based on its authentication of Haida history. That is to say, these objects represent tangible links to Haida land and historical relations through the practice of carving and storytelling. Still, “inalienability” is itself a contemporary category that fixes another meaning for these objects while also demonstrating the mutability of their status.

Thinking about the inalienable properties of argillite carving could also destabilize understandings of repatriation and affect the relationships between contemporary museums and Indigenous source communities by prompting museums to re-think the categories that usually circumscribe object types considered eligible for return. Because of their conventional commodity status, argillite carvings to my knowledge generally fall outside established categories of repatriatable objects, which are usually objects of household, sacred and ceremonial value. Discounting objects originally made for trade from the negotiating table would limit considerations of the

⁶¹ Jennifer Kramer, *Switchbacks: Art, Ownership, and Nuxalk National Identity* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006), 60-61; Emma Elizabeth Ferry, “Inalienable Commodities: The Production and Circulation of Silver and Patrimony in a Mexican Mining Cooperative,” *Cultural Anthropology* 17 (3) (August 2002): 331-358; Solen Roth, “Argillite, faux-argillite and black plastic: The political economy of simulating a quintessential Haida substance,” *Journal of Material Culture* 20 (3) (2015): 299-312.

ways that their values and meanings may have changed for Indigenous people since the colonial period.

The notion that an object carries any enduring identity throughout the transactions in which it is exchanged is disputed by Nicholas Thomas in his influential book *Entangled Objects* (1991). The concept of “entanglement” is a way to look at colonial exchange as a complex, uneven and multi-sited process between colonized and colonizing people and the agencies of both groups. Drawing from accounts of late eighteenth and nineteenth century Indigenous-European encounters, collecting and ethnographic fieldwork in the Pacific, Thomas shows that the meanings of material things past and present are contingent and emerge from the entangled and multiple histories between colonizers and colonized. Indigenous peoples’ experiences with, and responses to colonialism were multiple and varied, and Thomas argues that early encounters must be analyzed in terms of Indigenous as well as European agendas. One way to approach Indigenous views of colonial experiences is through material culture; how Indigenous peoples re-used and appropriated European goods obtained through trade to suit their own purposes (and vice versa) shows them to be “entangled objects”

subject to multiple uses and recontextualizations, processes that “[characterize] the social life of most things.”⁶²

The objects of colonial encounters, Thomas argues, hold values and meanings which are culturally and socially constituted: “the transformation and contextual mutation of objects cannot be appreciated if it is presumed that gifts are inevitably gifts and commodities inevitably commodities.”⁶³ As noted above, the blurring of the gift/commodity distinction through the examination of the trajectories of object “careers” or “biographies” was a major contribution of Appadurai’s edited volume, *The Social Life of Things* (1986). In his opening essay, “Commodities and the Politics of Value,” Appadurai points out that the status of an object is contingent upon how, and in what context it circulates or is apprehended. While objects have “commodity candidacy,” this status depends on the situation of the object.⁶⁴ Appadurai proposes that the “commodity situation in the social life of any ‘thing’ be defined as the situation in which its exchangeability (past, present, or future) for some other thing is

⁶² Robert Foster, “Tracking Globalization: Commodities and Value in Motion,” in *Handbook of Material Culture*, ed. Chris Tilley et al. (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage, 2006), 291.

⁶³ Nicholas Thomas, *Entangled Objects: Exchange, Material Culture and Colonialism in the Pacific* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1991), 39.

⁶⁴ Arjun Appadurai, “Commodities and the Politics of Value,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, edited by Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 16.

its socially relevant feature.”⁶⁵ The commodity situation furthermore is merely one kind of state in which an object may exist. The potential impermanence of the commodity status is the central point of Kopytoff’s essay “The Cultural Biography of Things,” in which he argues that a feature of object biographies is an object’s ability to move in and out of arenas of commodification.⁶⁶

Appadurai’s framework is theoretically and methodologically relevant to this thesis. If we take the view that the meanings of things are historically and culturally contingent,

...we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things. Thus even though from a theoretical point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a methodological point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social contexts.⁶⁷

Tracing the biographies of argillite carvings produced on the Northwest Coast of Canada and now in Scottish museum collections is the general methodology of this thesis. Below, I provide a more specific account of my approach to this research and the primary sources consulted.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 13.

⁶⁶ Ibid. See also Igor Kopytoff, “The Cultural Biography of Things,” in *The Social Life of Things*, 64-91.

⁶⁷ Appadurai, “Commodities and the Politics of Value,” 5.

Each situation an object enters into is regulated by a regime of value, a set of criteria (not necessarily commensurate in intercultural exchange relations) by which value is invested in objects. As I hope to have made clear, the meanings of objects are subject to change, demonstrating what Fred Myers calls their “slippage” as they move through “multiple, coexisting, and variously related ‘regimes of value.’” The value possessed by objects, Myers observes, is never static but must be “sustained or reproduced through the complex work of production.”⁶⁸ As I show in Chapter 5, the articulation of Haida identities today through art-making is a complex negotiation of individual, local and outsider assumptions and expectations around what it means to be Haida and what constitutes authentic representations of Haida cultural heritage. How Haidas today remake historically commoditized objects into objects of cultural patrimony is also examined there.

As objects move in and out of various regimes of value, we might view the ways in which they get reconfigured as a process through which they become theoretically richer, denser and more meaningful. Art historian Aldona Jonaitis uses the metaphor of “wrapping” to convey the multiplicity of meanings of Northwest Coast objects throughout their museum careers:

⁶⁸ Fred Myers, “Introduction,” in *The Empire of Things: Regimes of Value and Material Culture* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press; Oxford: James Currey Ltd. 2001), 6.

Every item in a museum exhibit is wrapped in many layers of meanings, interpretations, analyses, and representations that include its original meanings, the process of its acquisition, its exhibition and scholarly history, the type of galleries and museums in which it resides, the attitudes of contemporary First Nations people about it, its economic value, and the relationships visitors have (or do not have) with it. When the understandings of museum objects change radically, as they have over the past thirty years, their previous wrappings do not vanish but instead become enveloped by the new meanings, which resonate in varying ways with the earlier ones. Understood in this way, museum representations of Northwest Coast art remain always centred on the object itself but acknowledge the impermanence of any single perspective on that object.⁶⁹

This concept describes the build-up of an intangible patina of meaning over the course of an object's career. "Wrapping" also acknowledges the unstable relationship between the relative stability of the object's material properties and the impermanence of its meanings. This concept, Jonaitis explains, follows from developments in material culture theory begun in the 1980s including the work of scholars discussed above. The biography of objects and the social life of things, entanglement, the paradox of inalienable commodities and wrapping are all concepts that have encouraged more complex readings of the roles of objects and their mediation of human relationships in various social, cultural and political situations.

In summary, this thesis is about transcultural objects collected in (pre) colonial contact zones and their legacies. The curious character of argillite carvings puzzled and attracted early and mid-nineteenth century observers and collectors. By the late

⁶⁹ Aldona Jonaitis, "Museums and Northwest Coast Art," in *Native Art of the Northwest Coast*, 757.

nineteenth century, a timeframe just outside the boundaries of this study, ethnographic collectors, searching for material expressions of the pre-contact lifestyles of Indigenous North Americans, found works of Haida argillite to be problematic evidence of acculturation and the effects of modernity.

In his analysis of late-nineteenth century Northwest Coast arts and material culture, anthropologist Aaron Glass proposes that we think of “objects of exchange” like argillite carvings as “boundary objects,” which he describes as “the mobile, the variegated, the hybrid, the apparently unclassifiable.”⁷⁰ As noted, the idea of the instability of objects and the mutability of their meanings has been developed over the past four decades. As Glass points out, by dislodging objects from previously fixed intellectual categories we might uncover closer and more complicated readings of the colonial histories these objects illuminate.

This thesis approaches the study of historical argillite carvings mainly through the histories of their collection. Though it is not a specifically art historical or anthropological analysis of the argillite works in the Scottish collections, it does draw on the contributions of the scholars reviewed earlier to form a more robust understanding of the significance of the imagery, materials and meaning of particular works. Below, I describe my approach to narrating the stories of four collections by

⁷⁰ Glass, *Objects of Exchange*, 7.

tracing their histories of production, circulation and display through British and Canadian museum and archival stores, and through interviews with museum curators and contemporary Haida carvers and experts.

1.6 *Research methodology*

My research investigated how argillite carvings and their biographies affect, and are affected by, human relationships. Together, the information I drew from the following disparate sources are the threads weaving stories of trade, travel and exchange from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. My research and data collection drew on a range of qualitative methods from the fields of history, art history and anthropology.

Qualitative research is the process of inquiry for understanding “a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words [and] reporting detailed views of informants.”⁷¹ This research inquired into “the world of social agents and historical actors” such as fur traders and explorers, through “complex processes of social interaction involving history, language, action,” and objects.⁷² Object analysis, document analysis and semi-structured interviews were the three qualitative methods I used to reconstruct the social lives of argillite collections in

⁷¹ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage Publications: 1994), 2.

⁷² Ibid.

the Scottish museums. My decision to focus exclusively on HBC-related collections at the NMS, UAM and PMAG was informed by two main interests: how the collections could be used to develop a better understanding of the intercultural dynamics of the mid-nineteenth century Northwest Coast, as well as the opportunity to organize this study around the life experiences of four fascinating Scottish collectors.

I began fieldwork during Winter 2012 in the storerooms of the NMS, UAM and PMAG, where I photographed and catalogued each of the approximately 60 argillite carvings in these three museums (i.e. both HBC and non-HBC related collections) to build a record of their physical appearance, dimensions and associated inscriptions and documentation. My collections research also made use of the museums' archives and artifact files. I developed an understanding of the history and context of early ethnographic collections by reading through the NMS's annual reports, which charted the Museum's mandate, institutional changes and artifact acquisitions from 1855 onward. Other important sources for the documentation and description of individual objects included artifact labels, acquisition data in the Museum's accessions ledgers and Museum index/catalogue cards, stored in the files of the Department of World Cultures. Directors' correspondence and newspaper scrapbooks provided relevant contextual information regarding the intellectual and social context of the Museum's collections from the mid-1850s and 60s. Museum

guides were also valuable documents for understanding the exhibition arrangements, didactic purposes and narratives constructed around displays for the public. Of the three Scottish museums, the NMS retains the most substantial records of its argillite collections.

The argillite collections of the UAM are partly in storage and partly on display at the Marischal College Museum, which is now closed to the public. This museum has limited archival material relating to these collections, such as that of William Mitchell who left no records of his own. University of Aberdeen PhD student Helen Southwood's comprehensive cultural history of Marischal Museum in the twentieth century (2003) was a valuable source for understanding the Museum's anthropological collections and exhibitions.⁷³ After my initial research visit to Aberdeen in Winter 2012, I returned the following year for four days' research in the Museum stores and was given the opportunity to document the carvings that staff members pulled from display cases. During this time, I accessed the Museum's catalogues and catalogue cards, as well as a file on the Mitchell collection and various documents relating to him, including exhibition photos of his collection as it was displayed in the late 1970s. Furthermore, I searched the University Senatus records though these yielded no

⁷³ Helen Southwood, "A cultural history of Marischal Anthropological Museum in the twentieth century" (PhD diss., University of Aberdeen, 2003).

relevant information. The information I gathered on Mitchell has therefore been drawn mostly from the few records at the UAM, from records at the HBCA and British Columbia Provincial Archives (BCPA) and from a few published comments on Mitchell's biography.

My research at the PMAG began with the Museum's ethnography catalogue (1978), which according to curator Mark Hall, represents nearly the extent of the Museum's knowledge of its ethnographic collections. In Perth, I consulted the Museum's file on collector Colin Robertson, as well as research files compiled on its ethnographic collections from the Northwest Coast, which consist of research inquiries, loan records and scholarly publications. The Museum has few records documenting its historical exhibitions, and only a few photos of its rotunda taken in the early twentieth century represent its knowledge of how ethnographic objects were displayed there historically.

Though I made return trips to the Scottish museums throughout the course of my research, I made individual extended research trips to the BCPA in Victoria during the summer of 2012 and to the HBCA in Winnipeg in the summer of 2013. At both archives I searched for information directly or indirectly relating to the argillite collections in the Scottish museums. Over five weeks at the BCPA I consulted HBC ship and fort files that had been copied from originals at the HBCA, or that had been

deposited there on HBC employees who settled permanently in the colonies/province of British Columbia. I also consulted missionary records from the HBC's Fort Simpson, British and Canadian survey records, and private records of early settlers to Vancouver Island. I searched the BCPA's holdings filed under "Haida Indians," as well as records from individual fur traders whose biographical details appear in this thesis.

At the HBCA in Winnipeg, I read fort and ship logs relevant to the Scottish museum collections from the 1820s to 1860s, the decades in which most of the argillite carvings were assembled. I also consulted inventory lists for information on the range of goods traded to, and acquired from Aboriginal people, correspondence between traders and private employee records to trace the travels of particular traders. The HBCA's "Search Files" were a valuable source for research on individual topics and people, which have been compiled by HBCA and private researchers over decades of research inquiries.

Victoria's *British Colonist* colonial newspaper, now digitized, was a useful resource for finding references to people and events in Victoria from 1858 to 1910. Its database can be searched for generic historical terms such as "curiosities" and "Hydah [sic] Indians," to the names of particular collectors, including "John Rae" and "James Hector." This source allowed me to place both Rae and Hector in Victoria on

particular dates, to document their reception by colonial society and to understand the character of early Victoria when they visited in the late 1850s and 60s.

In order to track the histories of these collections into contemporary times (and outside of the archive) my research took me to Vancouver and Haida Gwaii, where over the course of seven weeks in Spring 2014 I conducted semi-structured interviews with Haida argillite carvers and artists, and community experts, regarding the history of argillite carving and its significance in Haida art. In keeping with the objective of the semi-structured interview, my aim was to understand my interlocutors' points of view on the process of carving, the market for their work on Haida Gwaii and on the Northwest Coast art market, and the meanings to them, if any, of historical works in museum collections.⁷⁴ Additionally, I sought the perspectives of curators at the three Scottish museums for their knowledge and insights into the histories of artifact collection and acquisition, the use of the argillite in historical and contemporary exhibitions, as well as the character of collections access and the relationships between Indigenous source communities and the museums. These latter conversations occurred both informally during my collections visits, as well as in semi-structured interviews

⁷⁴ For a description on semi-structured interviews, see Andrea Fontana and James Frey, "Interviewing: the Art of Science," in *The Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. N.a.Y.L. Denzin (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994).

or email correspondence conducted with curators at the museums in Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Perth.

A recent body of scholarship exploring the relationships between Indigenous communities and collections of historic material culture in UK museums provided sound methodological models for my research on Haida Gwaii. Knowles (2011), Krmpotich and Peers (2013), and Peers and Brown (2003, 2006) have all stressed the importance of recognizing the different ways that objects and collections of Indigenous material heritage are known and valued to their various “owners.” As I show in Chapter 5 of this thesis, First Nations material heritage in the world’s museums is considered by many Indigenous people to be displaced cultural property that must be returned. Krmpotich (2010) has shown that for the Haida, the repatriation of ancestral human remains serves – in addition to literally bringing ancestors home – a generative purpose in the production of material culture through which kinship ties are strengthened. Though my research with Haida artists, community members and experts did not focus on the production of kinship relations, I did find that speaking with Haidas about argillite carving elicited powerful commentary about the relationship between this carving tradition and the memories of friends, family and mentors through whom contemporary artists learned to carve and sell the material. Taking images of the Scottish collections to Haida Gwaii and Vancouver furthermore,

elicited strong responses from some Haidas about the colonial history of collecting and the ways in which researchers can, in the absence of the repatriation of actual objects, “give back” information about the objects to Haida communities. These issues are discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Drawing from the fields of history, art history and anthropology (and its sub-fields of material culture studies and ethnography), the core strength of this thesis is its interdisciplinary approach to assessing the historical and contemporary value of argillite carving and its changing meanings. As the thesis will show, the lives of these objects are not over, but rather, in different ways and to varying degrees, they continue to play roles in the representations that Haidas and Scots construct of their respective histories and identities. The thesis thus adds art and anthropology to history, and history to anthropology and art, in order to shed light on a few interesting episodes in the history of Canada and its founding peoples.

1.7 Chapter summaries

This thesis is composed of four substantial chapters, each addressing various phases in the biographies of argillite carvings and collections. Contemporary meanings constructed around these objects in museums and source communities are investigated in Chapters 2 and 5. Chapters 3 and 4 primarily address their nineteenth century contexts of circulation and collection.

Chapter 2 introduces these Scottish argillite collections in the ongoing phase of their careers as museum objects. As Jonaitis has pointed out, when understandings of museum objects change as they have over the past few decades, “their previous wrappings do not vanish but instead become enveloped by the new meanings, which resonate in varying ways with the earlier ones.”⁷⁵ This chapter engages with the cultures of display of these objects throughout the nineteenth century and into the twenty-first. “Wrapped” variously and complexly as hybrid objects, narrative objects, authentic objects, and as objects of science, ethnography, craft, art and biography, these modes of display and interpretation are investigated as Western traditions of meaning-making. How contemporary curators interrogate these traditions through exhibition is shown in this chapter to be a late twentieth and twenty-first century concern.

Chapter 3 investigates the character of the Northwest Coast fur trade from the 1820s to 1860s, the decades in which these argillite collections were made and entered into Scottish museums. I trace the development of relationships between Indigenous peoples and Europeans at key HBC trade nodes with particular focus on the posts and ships that facilitated the movement and circulation of these objects. How the collections emerged from this fur trade – along trade routes, at forts, through oral and

⁷⁵ Jonaitis, “Museums and Northwest Coast Art,” in *Native Art of the Northwest Coast*, 757.

written communication and social networks – are key points in understanding their character and, as addressed in Chapter 4, their meanings as curiosities, souvenirs or specimens for mid-nineteenth century Scottish collectors.

What these collections meant to Robertson, Mitchell, Hector and Rae, and the ways in which they were valued and evaluated historically is the topic of Chapter 4.

By the early 1860s when Hector and Rae visited the Northwest Coast, colonial encroachment especially at the growing settlement of Victoria, presented a very different set of dynamics and living conditions for Aboriginal people from the 1820s and 30s when Robertson acquired his Northwest Coast collection. As Hector's exploratory reports show, the presumed or imagined authenticity of Indigenous peoples in a rapidly colonizing North America was perceived as a problematic issue. That they were beginning to be seen as imperilled foreshadowed the division of objects of Indigenous material cultures into "authentic" and "inauthentic" categories that succeeding scientific generations would codify through professional ethnographic collecting and writing.

Despite being judged by anthropologists as an inauthentic kind of object from the late nineteenth century into the twentieth, argillite carving has been treated in art historical scholarship from the late 1970s as an authentic and ongoing expression of Haida art and identity, articulated through the production of small-scale tourist pieces

to works exhibited in Vancouver's prestigious Aboriginal art galleries and sold through private patronage. Still, my fieldwork interactions suggest that argillite's ongoing status in the wider world as an art commodity and source of income and cultural pride, is matched, particularly with reference to historical works, with a sense of inalienability and proprietorship of the argillite carving tradition. When viewed from a perspective of cultural loss, the alienability associated with the original "trade" status of these objects is challenged by contemporary Haidas, who desire to regain cultural knowledge through contact with objects considered displaced.⁷⁶ In other words, the position of Haida people today to these works differs from that of their original makers from the 1820s to 60s, even though contemporary carvers still sell their work for the same basic economic reasons as their predecessors. Chapter 5 therefore examines two key themes: Haidas' attitudes towards the inalienability and proprietorship of the argillite carving tradition, and the shift in status of historical

⁷⁶ Jonaitis is careful to point out that "First Nations people have...been responding creatively to the conditions of colonialism for centuries and have not 'lost' their culture." See "A 'novel and modern' artist: Charles Edenshaw," in *Charles Edenshaw*, 196. While this is true, as Robert Davidson has observed, Haidas "have suffered great losses since the arrival of the *Yaats Xaadee* [the "Iron [i.e. European] People"], of our population, cultural knowledge, and especially our self-esteem, our sense of identity; members of a whole generation were denied their own cultural values. There have been many changes, some of them good, and some from which we are still recovering." See "Reclaiming Haida Culture," in Augaitis et al., *Raven Travelling: Two Centuries of Haida Art* (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery; Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre; Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 49.

argillite carvings from trade commodities and museum objects to objects of Haida cultural patrimony.

Chapter 2: Haida material heritage in Scottish museums

2.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates the ways in which Haida material heritage has been represented in three Scottish museums from the nineteenth century to the twenty-first. Each museum is approached as an individual case study focusing on interpretations of Northwest Coast art and material heritage. Each case study begins with the most recent uses to which Haida art has been put in the museum space. The National Museum of Scotland, the University of Aberdeen Museums and the Perth Museum and Art Gallery differ in size, purpose and scope, so case studies are constructed from the various institutional records available at each, and from interviews, conversations and email communication with curators. Where possible, the discussion accounts for the display and interpretation of Haida argillite carving, otherwise, it focuses on the museums' interpretations of Northwest Coast art more generally.

Though each having different histories and objectives, the national museum, the university museum and the local museum have all engaged in various cultures of display around ethnographic collections. The ways in which Northwest Coast art works are interpreted and represented today are extensions of historical traditions of “wrapping” the objects of others. Each museum continues in this tradition but in ways

that reflexively engage with current debates in museum ethnography, reflecting the museums' interrogation of past modes of representation.

Currently, works of argillite and other collected Northwest Coast objects are on display at the NMS and the UAM, though the Marischal Museum, the UAM's former exhibition space, is now closed to the public. The William Mitchell collection is on display there as part of an updated version of the University's 1995 exhibition *Collecting the World*, and is accessible to visitors by appointment. The Marischal College building, leased to the Aberdeen City Council, has been the Council's headquarters since 2009. At the time of writing, no Northwest Coast art is displayed at the PMAG, whose current exhibitions address topics on Perth's local natural and human history. In Edinburgh meanwhile, NMS's World Cultures curators installed several works of Northwest Coast art, argillite included, in several cases in its recently refurbished galleries, *Artistic Legacies* and *Living Lands* (2011). I discuss these galleries, and the three museums' historical exhibition strategies, in further detail below.

2.2 *A hybrid object to think through*

The objects this thesis investigates have been put to many uses. Anthropologist Jennifer Kramer has pointed out that art has a shifting quality that "allows it to be

many things to many different people,” and that “Northwest Coast First Nations art’s strength is in its ability to be meaningful yet never totally known.”⁷⁷ The different ways of knowing argillite carvings is a thread connecting each chapter in this thesis. The object that perhaps best embodies the mutability of argillite carving is a mid-nineteenth century representation of the HBC’s steamship *Beaver*, which forms part of William Mitchell’s collection of ship pipes at the University of Aberdeen (see Figure 2). In my fieldwork interactions, this “hybrid” object provoked a range of feelings and attitudes towards its value and perceived in/authenticity as an object representing Haida and Euro-North American material histories. As such, it is an appropriate object to introduce the ways that argillite has been thought through and interpreted in Scottish museums.

⁷⁷ Kramer, *Switchbacks*, 6.

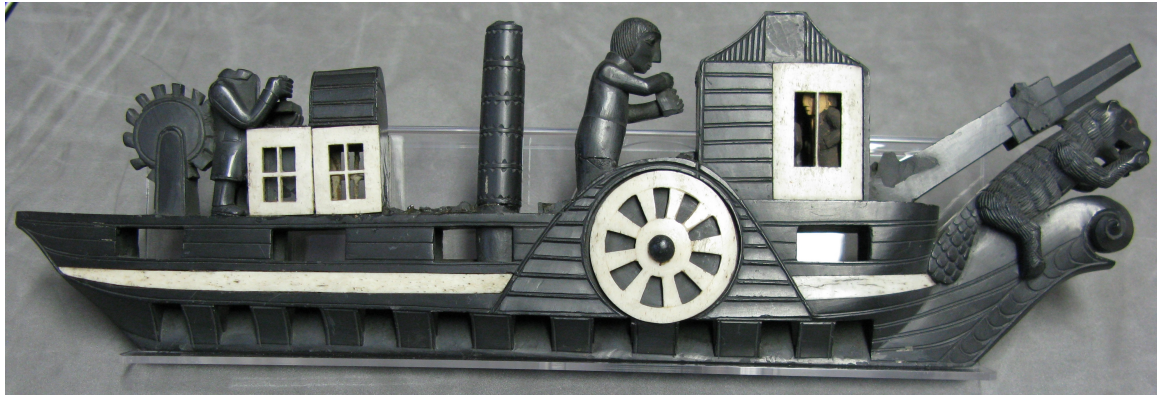


Figure 2. Argillite carving of the *Beaver* steamship (with whalesbone, wood and paper)

University of Aberdeen Museums

Collected by Captain William Mitchell

ABDUA: 5559

40 cm x 11.9 cm x 2.6 cm

Photo by Kaitlin McCormick, courtesy University of Aberdeen Museums

Hybridity is an important yet divisive post-colonial concept. It is a term used in horticulture to describe the third, “hybrid” species that is created when two species are crossbred by grafting or through cross-pollination. In post-colonial terms, hybridity “commonly refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization.”⁷⁸ In his book *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha promoted “hybridity” as an empowering term to recognize the mutually-constitutive agencies and subjectivities of colonizing and colonized people, constructed in a politically and culturally ambivalent “third space.”⁷⁹ Though the term

⁷⁸ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 108.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

has been interpreted and criticized for negating inequality and imbalanced power relations in the colonial situation, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin contend that there is “nothing in the idea of hybridity...that suggests that mutuality negates the hierarchical nature of the imperial process or that it involves the idea of an equal exchange.”⁸⁰

Describing cultural negotiation and performance in unequal contact zones, hybridity is a useful term to characterize the objects investigated in this thesis, as well as to describe the complex situations in which they were collected.⁸¹

Glass, curator of the *Objects of Exchange* exhibition (Bard Graduate Centre, 2011), used “hybridity” as one of many conceptual themes to characterize late-nineteenth century Northwest Coast objects. A central theme of that exhibition, hybridity describes objects that feature intercultural aesthetic or material attributes, such as Haida wooden carvings featuring Christian and Haida spiritual subject matter.⁸² “Such stylistically hybrid objects,” writes Glass, tell complex stories of exchange and transformation – even before the arrival of Europeans.” Glass’s use of hybridity also recognizes the complexity of intra-Indigenous exchanges prior to, and

⁸⁰ Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies*, 109.

⁸¹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 110-114.

⁸² “Figure,” Bard Graduate Centre, *Objects of Exchange*, accessed 9 October 2015, <http://www.bgc.bard.edu/gallery/gallery-at-bgc/past-exhibitions/focus-gallery-2/object-gallery/1-figure.html>.

after colonization, pointing out that the transformative character of Northwest Coast art forms have a history that precedes European influence.⁸³

Captain Mitchell's argillite *Beaver* pipe, an object with a particularly active social life, was featured in the *Objects of Exchange* catalogue as an example of how Northwest Coast artists "indigenized" European introduced trade goods. As a catalogue essay suggests, the artist, in

...making a visual analogy between a trading vessel and a ceremonial object [the pipe]...may have been attempting to convey his own high status through symbolic association with the wealth and prestige that Euro-North Americans facilitated among coastal chiefs in the mid-nineteenth century.⁸⁴

A compelling object to think through from the potential perspective of its original maker or owner, the *Beaver* carving continues to captivate audiences in Aberdeen, not least for Neil Curtis, Head of Museums at the UAM, where the Mitchell collection has been since at least 1887. Curtis discussed his attachment to this piece, whose "story and importance is so powerful [in Aberdeen]."⁸⁵ As he points out, this object is a tangible link between Aberdeen and the Northwest Coast of Canada, disparate places connected through mid-nineteenth century international trade and travel. For Curtis, the *Beaver* pipe embodies that history, and encodes the personal experiences of an Aberdonian ship captain: "you're able to say that '[Mitchell] was mate on board that

⁸³ Glass, *Objects of Exchange*, 24.

⁸⁴ LW, "Pipe," in *Objects of Exchange*, 155.

⁸⁵ Neil Curtis. Interview with Kaitlin McCormick, Aberdeen, 26 February 2015.

ship,' he identified with the ship so it's his story that comes through."⁸⁶ As I show in Chapter 4, Mitchell's reminiscences of the *Beaver* steamship have been recorded in various sources, and the ship is remembered in Canadian history with affection and nostalgia, even though its role in colonial processes warrants a more critical historical analysis.

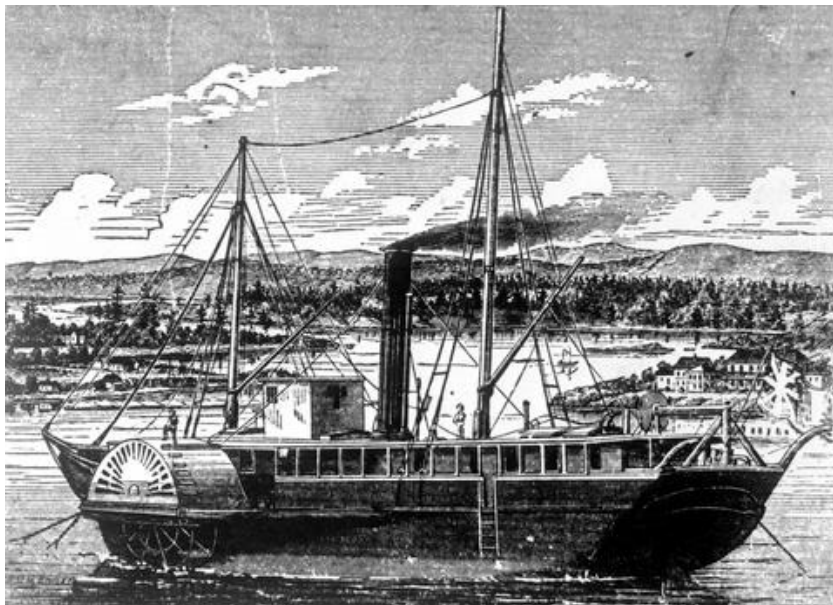


Figure 3. Drawing of the *SS Beaver*
British Columbia Provincial Archives
A-04109
Image courtesy of B.C. Archives collections

The HBC's famous side-paddle wheeler was built on the Thames in 1835 and sailed in August of that year for the Columbia fur-trading district with its paddles in its hold. A

⁸⁶ Neil Curtis. Interview with Kaitlin McCormick, Aberdeen, 26 February 2015.

“peripatetic trading post,” the *Beaver* had “full charge of the Coast fur trade from 1836 [to] 1860.” Mitchell was employed upon it for at least a year during this time.⁸⁷ The *Beaver* became a well-traveled and highly recognizable figure on the Northwest Coast and through its career underwent a number of physical changes, having been refitted from HBC fur trade ship to British survey ship in 1862. Near the end of its career, before it ran aground at Vancouver Harbour in 1888, the *Beaver* was purchased to use as a private shipping and ferry service between Vancouver and Victoria.⁸⁸ A physically hybrid ship, its argillite model has in turn inspired commentary on the visual and conceptual hybridity of argillite works from the mid-nineteenth century.

As Curtis has observed, postcolonial scholarship has created an interest in “how the ‘other’ looks at us, and has validated those obviously hybrid objects [like the *Beaver* carving], which have an extra interest because they’re about contact” between cultures.⁸⁹ In Northwest Coast art history, “hybrid” works are now recognized to be authentic expressions of Indigenous peoples’ experiences with modernity and reflect

⁸⁷ W. Kaye Lamb, “S.S. Beaver: Regal Yacht of 1858,” *The Beaver Magazine* (Winter 1958), 11.

⁸⁸ “Beaver (Steamer),” *Canadian Encyclopedia*, accessed 4 July 2015, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/beaver-steamer/>.

⁸⁹ Neil Curtis. Interview with Kaitlin McCormick, Aberdeen, 26 February 2015.

their entanglement with “regional, national and international forces.”⁹⁰ Of course, this way of seeing things was not always so.

In the Victorian era, as Phillips and Steiner point out, the mass production of commodities intensified interactions between producers and consumers, bringing people who may not otherwise have interacted into regular contact.⁹¹ For example Fort Simpson, an important HBC northern coastal post, was one such place where the diversity of peoples, cultural influences and exchange transactions influenced the production of the innovative art form of argillite ship pipes. In colonizing spaces such as the nineteenth century Northwest Coast, the production of hybrid forms increased within the context of the tourist trade from the 1880s onward.⁹² Until recently, commoditized objects were left out of anthropological and art historical discussions about the creative activities of colonized peoples because of their “stylistic hybridity, which conflicted with essentialist notions of the relationship between style and culture,” and because their “production for an external market...conflict[ed] with widespread ideas of authenticity.”⁹³

⁹⁰ James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 154.

⁹¹ Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher Steiner, *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1999), 9.

⁹² Glass, *Objects of Exchange*, 15.

⁹³ Phillips and Steiner, *Unpacking Culture*, 9.

Today, as Bunn-Marcuse argues, Haida art that exhibits the influences of Euro-American design or material culture must be understood not as “distinct from work in ‘traditional’ style, but as an integral part of the full aesthetic expression of a modern artist of the late-nineteenth century.” Indeed, “new considerations of how Northwest Coast artists engaged with other cultural forms and ideas are rapidly gaining attention in twenty-first century art studies.”⁹⁴ Argillite carvings from the decades of the mid-nineteenth century should also be part of this conversation, because they show how Haida artists engaged with European material culture in a way that was fully their own.⁹⁵

As arts reflecting contact, works like the *Beaver* pipe mediate Haida and European experiences with the modernizing Northwest Coast, and allude to the conditions that were changing the ways in which Indigenous people lived during decades of transformation and adjustment to new social and political circumstances. For Curtis, Mitchell’s argillite pipes are significant and interesting because they represent “such an early collection by somebody from Aberdeen in that story [of

⁹⁴ Bunn-Marcuse, “Eagles and Elephants,” in *Charles Edenshaw*, ed. Robin K. Wright and Daina Augaitis (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2013), 175.

⁹⁵ In her catalogue essay “A ‘Novel and Modern’ Artist: Charles Edenshaw,” art historian Aldona Jonaitis shows how Edenshaw and his wife Isabella engaged with the modern conditions of the late-nineteenth century Northwest Coast. In *Charles Edenshaw*, 195-201.

contact and intercultural exchange].”⁹⁶ In addition to being witnesses to the historical links between disparate communities, these kinds of objects, for the museum curator grappling with the politics of representation, undermine outdated concepts of authenticity and support new ones.

Curators at each of the three Scottish museums are engaged in contemporary debates in museum ethnography, which include the ways in which museums interact with Indigenous source communities and represent their material heritage. Each furthermore has interrogated the complex histories of collection, acquisition and representation of the objects of “others.” The following discussion explores the ways that Northwest Coast arts and material heritage have been, and are currently displayed and interpreted in these museums, and how the exhibitions converse with past modes of representation. Hybridity though compelling, is only one lens through which argillite has been viewed and displayed at these museums over the past century and a half, and I will return to the significance of this concept in the conclusion to this chapter. I begin with the National Museum of Scotland, whose argillite collections have received the least scholarly attention, despite being more fully documented than those at Aberdeen and Perth, whose histories follow.

⁹⁶ Neil Curtis. Interview with Kaitlin McCormick, Aberdeen, 26 February 2015.

2.3 The representation of Northwest Coast material heritage at the National Museum of Scotland

The National Museum of Scotland's seven World Cultures galleries occupy three floors of the refurbished Victorian museum building, which reopened to the public in 2011 shortly before I began the research for this thesis.⁹⁷ The *Living Lands* and *Artistic Legacies* galleries both exhibit historical and contemporary Northwest Coast works; *Artistic Legacies*, situated on the Museum's fifth floor, features three argillite carvings, each illustrating a different iteration of this art form.



Figure 4. Pipes in argillite and wood, NMS

On display, *Artistic Legacies* gallery

Photo by Kaitlin McCormick

⁹⁷ These galleries are “Living Lands,” “Patterns of Life,” “Imagine,” “Performance and Lives,” “Facing the Sea,” “Inspired by Nature,” and “Artistic Legacies.”

The three works of argillite encased in *Artistic Legacies* (two of which are pictured in Figure 4) are featured alongside works of carved horn and wood. A northern Northwest Coast bowl, made of mountain sheep horn and carved with the Beaver crest of its original owner, sits below a spoon whose mountain-goat horn handle is carved with interlocking figures of humans and animals. A tiny wooden bowl carved in the form of a frog and inlaid with abalone shell, and a raven rattle, are displayed alongside these nineteenth-century objects. Panel text speaks to “the value of carving:”

The indigenous peoples of North America’s Northwest Coast are known for their sophisticated and powerful carvings. In the past, as today, artworks served two purposes, proclaiming family and position by displaying crests, and making the supernatural world visible. Combining three-dimensional and deep relief techniques, carvers applied a formalized design system with fluency and integrity over a range of materials.⁹⁸

To the bottom and right of these objects exemplifying the horn crest art, raven rattle and carved bowls, are examples of “art made for strangers”: the three argillite pieces, and a wooden ship pipe similar in form and subject matter to the argillite versions.

Three iterations of argillite carving are represented: an early nineteenth century ceremonial pipe form (6), a mid-nineteenth century ship pipe form (7, also pictured in

⁹⁸ “The value of carving” panel text, *Artistic Legacies* gallery, National Museum of Scotland, accessed 6 October 2015.

Figure 1) and a late-nineteenth century platter (8), which features a dogfish and shaman (see Figure 5).



Figure 5. Argillite platter, NMS
On display, *Artistic Legacies* gallery
Photo by Kaitlin McCormick

Curators interpreted these works as tourist trade items and positioned this dynamic carving tradition in the context of intercultural interactions, noting Haida artists' commercial agency and also their "desire to document their culture." Referring to the argillite and wooden ship pipe shown here, the panel explains that many such pieces "satirically reflect on Euro-American encroachment."⁹⁹ None of the three carvings on display here were acquired through HBC collecting but each was purchased by the

⁹⁹ "Art made for strangers" panel text, *Artistic Legacies* gallery, National Museum of Scotland, accessed 6 October 2015.

museum. Still, the argillite ship pipe pictured in Figure 4 has a fascinating history that warrants a closer view. Purchased in 1906 for one pound and six shillings, the Museum's original accession entry described this object as a "tobacco-pipe head of black slate, carved in openwork, representing a sledge with white traders and a bear. Babeen tribe, British Columbia."¹⁰⁰ It is unclear why this piece was attributed to people from the central interior of British Columbia, but it could have been collected there in the mid-1850s given the network of fur trading posts and the extensive trade routes and travels of the fur traders (the topic of Chapter 3).

Prior to its having been acquired by the Museum, this piece was shown at the 1862 Industrial Exhibition in London, a world's fair at which objects of industry, science and art were displayed. Vancouver Island, then a crown colony, was one of the thousands of contributors who sent materials to London. Though the fascinating story of the Vancouver Island contribution is beyond the scope of this thesis, we know from its catalogue that raw and carved argillite (then called "slate") were among the "resources" it sent. "Indian manufactures" demonstrating the highly skilled craftsmanship of Northwest Coast (male) carvers and (female) weavers were sent to

¹⁰⁰ Accession register, Department of World Cultures, National Museum of Scotland.

London to “show capitalists that there was bone, muscle, energy and intellect [there] waiting for employment.”¹⁰¹

This piece was also illustrated by British watercolour artist L. Leila Hawkins in her catalogue *Illustrated Gleanings of Aboriginal Ornament from the International Exhibition of 1862*. There, Hawkins reproduced and described several of the works sent from the various British colonies.¹⁰² She reflected on this piece:

The subject is historical (though not of high cast) the story is clearly told and represents the difficulties of Colonisation in a swampy situation. – Two of the four human figures are employed in building a house, sawing timber with one man above, the other below as may be daily seen in the present outgrowing suburbs of London if we omit the peculiarity which the simplicity of the artist’s composition allows in the present instance where one of the Sawyers supports the end of the beam on his head. – The two figures on the other side of the house are occupied in resisting the attack of an Alligator apparently just issued from the water indicated by waved and straight lines at their feet the costume of the figures points to a very modern period, the whole thing is very spirited and very clearly and amusingly portrayed [sic].¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ “Industrial Exhibition Meeting,” *British Colonist*, 13 February 1861, <http://archive.org/stream/dailycolonist18610213uvic/18610213#page/n0/mode/1up>. See also “Catalogue of the Vancouver Contribution,” London International Exhibition 1862 (London: June, 1862).

¹⁰² This catalogue was produced for Henry Christy, who was a Quaker businessman and collector of botanical, ethnographic and archaeological specimens. Christy was an abolitionist and was concerned with the protection of Aboriginal peoples in British colonies. Most of his collection was gifted to the BM by the trustees of his estate. See “Henry Christy (Biographical Details),” The British Museum, accessed 11 October 2015, http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/term_details.aspx?bioId=40853.

¹⁰³ L. Leila Hawkins, “Aboriginal Ornament Selected from the International Exhibition of 1862. For Henry Christy, Esq.” Christy Library, plate 65, fig. 1.



Figure 6. Drawing of argillite ship pipe

L. Leila Hawkins, “Aboriginal Ornament Selected from the International Exhibition of 1862.”

British Museum

Am2006,Drg. 123

30.3 cm x 24 cm

Image courtesy The British Museum

What is striking about Hawkins’s description is that she frames this piece as a work of modern art, recognizing its contemporaneity and artistry. She does not describe the piece using the typical terms of her contemporaries (“grotesque,” “ingenious”), but refers to its maker as an “artist” who has created a peculiar and simple but ultimately “modern” composition. Seeing this piece as a document of sorts is one of the ways in which argillite works continue to be interpreted today.

In the *Artistic Legacies* gallery, a text panel connects these nineteenth century carvings with contemporary pieces, showing, through the work of Tlingit artist Preston Singletary, how Northwest Coast carving is a “long-established artistic tradition which

[has] undergone repeated technological innovation.”¹⁰⁴ Singletary’s work, *Trance*, is a glass sculpture representing an oystercatcher rattle, an object traditionally used by Tlingit shamans and which was believed to channel the transformative power of the oystercatcher, which moves between sea, land and sky. Here, Singletary’s work is interpreted as an example of “new traditions,” transferring the “iconography, forms and symbolism central to the Northwest Coast carving tradition to glass.”¹⁰⁵

What messages are communicated through these displays? The language in the panel and label text describe Northwest Coast carving as ongoing, innovative traditions, and contemporary works such as Singletary’s are positioned in a longer artistic genealogy. The historical argillite pieces displayed in *Artistic Legacies* are framed as works of Haida economic agency, the artists interpreted as critical observers of the changing political, social and cultural circumstances on the nineteenth century Northwest Coast.

The theme of cultural continuity connects *Artistic Legacies* to *Living Lands* on the Museum’s ground floor. One of the first of three cases the visitor encounters contains a mannequin figure wearing a Thunderbird transformation mask and dancing

¹⁰⁴ “Carving in glass” panel text, *Artistic Legacies* gallery, National Museum of Scotland, accessed 6 October 2015.

¹⁰⁵ “New traditions” panel text, *Artistic Legacies* gallery, National Museum of Scotland, accessed 6 October 2015.

outfit by Kwakwaka'wakw artist Calvin Hunt (1999). To its left is a print depicting this dance by artist Joe Wilson (1997). Beside these is a larger case, titled "People of the Coast," in which various historical carved and textile objects are displayed to communicate Northwest Coast peoples' relationship with the land and sea and the supernatural world. Also displayed are ceremonial works showing how hierarchical, clan-based Northwest Coast societies were/are structured, and how social positions and events were, and are validated through the potlatch. Alongside a button blanket is a photograph of Tsimshian scholar and dancer Mique'l D'Angeli, who performs a traditional dance. "Northwest Coast communities," reads the panel text, "still express their culture through passing on stories and regalia, carving and weaving, raising totem poles and cooking traditional foods."¹⁰⁶

Henrietta Lidchi, the Museum's Keeper of World Cultures, identified the curatorial decisions which informed the design of both galleries: "We needed to illustrate that there was no one gallery that could encapsulate, in any meaningful sense, the whole of a culture through its process of changing."¹⁰⁷ The idea that culture is dynamic and that the meanings of material culture are ever changing informs these displays. According to Lidchi, central to each display are the museum's two raven

¹⁰⁶ "People of the Coast" panel text, *Artistic Legacies* gallery, National Museum of Scotland, accessed 6 October 2015.

¹⁰⁷ Henrietta Lidchi. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Edinburgh, 2 March 2015.

rattles, exhibited to show that visitors can “appreciate Northwest Coast artistic practice in two different ways...either in the context of the carved form and the discourse that has grown up around Northwest Coast *art* [as in *Artistic Legacies*] or...in terms of a more contextualized presentation [as in *Living Lands*].¹⁰⁸

While the argillite carvings may not be the central focus of *Artistic Legacies*, their display supports the idea of culture change and its reflection in art. Lidchi chose to exhibit the argillite ceremonial pipe, ship pipe and platter “because they show three different iterations of argillite in the same way that the other pieces in the case show the use of different materials, they show the use of different forms [and] carving techniques, and purposes for those carvings.”¹⁰⁹ Shape, form, visual appeal, and the heritage and dynamics of carving are the key interpretive strategies for communicating Haida cultural continuity in these display cases.

The art of the Northwest Coast, as Jonaitis has observed, has long fascinated outsiders, from eighteenth and nineteenth century visitors who were “‘astonished’” by northern carving, to the surrealists and abstract expressionists of the 1940s, who found “significant connections between their own works and Northwest Coast abstract form and mythological meaning.”¹¹⁰ In today’s galleries, NMS curators have chosen to

¹⁰⁸ Henrietta Lidchi. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Edinburgh, 2 March 2015.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. These pieces are respectively numbered, A.1904.202; A.1906.459; A.1924.387.

¹¹⁰ Aldona Jonaitis, *Art of the Northwest Coast* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), xiv.

represent the aesthetic and functional properties of the art from this diverse region by drawing from the Museum's historical and contemporary collections.

2.4 Historical ethnographic displays at Scotland's National Museum

What is now the National Museum of Scotland was established with parliamentary funds as Edinburgh's Industrial Museum of Scotland in 1854. The Museum's early collections were comprised of largely donated material; as a Museum guide noted in 1935, "many of its choicest specimens are due to the generosity of private benefactors."¹¹¹ Among its early donors was a young James Hector, whose collection arrived at the Museum in 1861.

As Knowles has pointed out, international collections reached Edinburgh in the Museum's early days partly through the efforts of George Wilson, its first Director. Wilson issued a call for material in the mid-1850s, shortly after the Museum was established. In his 1857 Annual Report, Wilson remarked that, "'an industrial museum...cannot be complete without illustrations of the existing state of the useful arts, among the...nations of the world.'"¹¹² The middle decades of the nineteenth

¹¹¹ "Preface," *The Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh: A General Guide to the Collections* (Edinburgh: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1935), 3.

¹¹² George Wilson, *Annual Report of the Director of the Industrial Museum of Scotland*. 31 January 1857, quoted in Knowles, "'Objects as Ambassadors': Representing Nation Through Museum Exhibitions," in *Unpacking the Collection: Networks of Material and Social Agency in the Museum*,

century saw a general interest in industry, from “raw materials through processes to end-products, and in industrial design.” These interests culminated in London’s Great Exhibition in 1851.¹¹³ The Museum was formed in this social context, and its exhibitions aimed to show the processual transformation of raw materials into finished products. Showcasing the “industrial arts” was a paradigm of Victorian museum display.¹¹⁴

Wilson built the Museum’s early collections by drawing from an extensive network of Scots who had traveled the world as traders, missionaries and explorers. The connections of his brother, the University of Toronto professor Daniel Wilson, were particularly useful in that respect. Professor Wilson put his brother in touch with George Simpson, the Scottish governor of the HBC. Simpson received George Wilson’s request for specimens and collecting criteria and issued a “circular” to the regional trading posts in the HBC territories.¹¹⁵ Such calls to collect were also issued by the custodian of the University of Edinburgh’s Museum of Natural History, whose

eds. Byrne, Clarke, Harrison and Torrence (New York, Dordrecht, Heidelberg, London: Springer, 2011), 237.

¹¹³ Douglas Allan, “The Royal Scottish Museum,” in *The Royal Scottish Museum: 1854-1954* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd Ltd., 1954), 5.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹¹⁵ Knowles, ““Objects as Ambassadors,”” in *Unpacking the Collection*, 237.

collections were transferred to the Industrial Museum's Department of Science and Art in 1855.¹¹⁶

As the NMS describes itself today, “two strands of history come together” in the development of Scotland's national museum: “the desire to have a museum reflecting Scottish history and the wish to have a museum demonstrating international cultures, natural and physical sciences, and decorative art for Scotland.”¹¹⁷ In 1985, the National Museum of Antiquities amalgamated with the Royal Scottish Museum (as it was known from 1904). At this moment, the National Museums of Scotland was created, and in 2006 it was rebranded as National Museums Scotland. This institution, Lidchi remarked, has always been “part of a network of ethnographic anthropology

¹¹⁶ HBC Secretary Fraser wrote AG Dallas of the Company's Board of Management that Fraser had been “directed by the Governor [Simpson]...to transmit...sundry copies of Instructions for the Collection of objects of Natural History issued by Mr Murray the Custodian of the Museum of Natural History in Edinburgh. For several years past the gentlemen in charge of stations in Hudson's Bay have, with the sanction and approval of the Governor and Committee been in the habit of collecting such specimens of Natural History as have fallen in their way and additions of great value have in that manner [added] to the information of Naturalists in this Country...In a letter which [Murray] addressed to this house on the subject, he says, ‘I am told if they (the Officers) had authority now and then to expend a few shillings worth on the Indians who bring anything curious, I would get more novelties, you have the kindness to instruct them that they may do so...’ It appears that these instructions have never yet made their way to the West Side of the Rocky Mountains. Mr. Murray has now requested that they should be distributed...the officers will be pleased to contribute to the object in view.” Letter, Fraser to AG Dallas, 28 August 1860, B.226/c/2, HBCA.

¹¹⁷ “History of National Museums Scotland,” National Museums Scotland, accessed 25 March 2015, <http://www.nms.ac.uk/about-us/history-of-national-museums-scotland/>

museums, and [has] been since the 1890s.”¹¹⁸ Indeed, the Museum’s annual reports document its Directors’ visits to museums in London to become familiar with their methods of classification and display as early as 1855.¹¹⁹ Ethnographic collections that arrived at the Industrial Museum in the mid-nineteenth century reflect both Scottish histories and the histories of foreign cultures. In this way the objects continue to support the Museum’s current objective as they did 165 years ago, though they are now displayed according to new understandings of the value and meaning of objects.

Broadly speaking, we can trace the shifts in the interpretation and display of Northwest Coast material heritage objects from the Museum’s beginnings to the present day from information gleaned from Museum guidebooks (1908-1935), annual reports (1855-c.1938) and sundry sources. Here, I situate the argillite collections in the context of NMS’s institutional history, accounting not only for Hector’s and Rae’s collections (discussed further in Chapters 3 and 4) but also to offer a few general notes on the fifteen pieces the Museum acquired by purchase from 1890 to 1938 when its argillite collecting apparently stopped. Though Hector’s donation appears to be the first argillite collection acquired by the Museum, it went on to purchase carvings in

¹¹⁸ Henrietta Lidchi. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Edinburgh, 2 March 2015.

¹¹⁹ See for example George Wilson, “Annual Report of the Director of the Industrial Museum of Scotland,” [1856] in *Directory of the Industrial Museum, Scotland and of the Natural History Museum, Edinburgh* (London: George E. Eyre & William Spottiswoode, 1858), 191.

1890, 1896, 1901-1902, 1904, 1906, 1921, 1923-1924 and 1938. The only of the three Scottish museums to purchase argillite carving, these pieces were largely acquired through auction or on the art market, and were displayed with the Museum's Ethnographic collections.¹²⁰

Director Wilson's annual reports indicate that the Industrial Museum's initial purpose was to collect examples of the industries of the world in relation to Scotland for the education of the Scottish people.¹²¹ In 1856 Wilson outlined the Museum's desire to acquire foreign collections illustrative of the "industrial arts" through the donations of Scots abroad:

The Industrial Museum cannot be complete, without historical illustrations of the progress of the useful arts... moreover, [it] cannot be complete without illustrations of the existing state of the useful arts among the less civilized nations of the world. A correspondence accordingly has been opened with agents in different quarters of the globe, which is likely to prove fruitful... intelligent men interested in the Museum have engaged to send examples of the native manufactures of [foreign] countries, [including from] the Red Indian districts... of the United States.¹²²

¹²⁰ For more details on how the NMS purchased works of argillite, see Alexander Dawkins, "Western Canada, Colonialism and Doctor Hector: an Investigation into the Royal Museum of Scotland's Argillite Holdings" (MA diss., University of Edinburgh, 2006).

¹²¹ "Directory of the Industrial Museum of Scotland," in *Directory*, 6.

¹²² George Wilson, "Annual Report of the Director of the Industrial Museum of Scotland," [1857] in *Directory*, 166.

It is this context in which James Hector's donation entered the Museum as one of its foundational collections.¹²³ Other notable donations from that time included those of the Scottish missionary David Livingstone and the Irish fur trader Bernard Rogan Ross, whose collection as Knowles has demonstrated, still connects the NMS with the Tlicho community in Canada's Northwest Territories.¹²⁴

Though it is not clear how Hector's argillite collection was displayed during these years, the annual report for 1859 shows that at this time specimens of economic geology, "including the Arts dealing with mineral products" were classed together.¹²⁵ In 1862, the year of London's Industrial Exhibition, collections were arranged in a temporary exhibit that included "ornamental carvings in stone and wood" from various countries. That same year, objects flowed into the museum, as well as publications "on subjects connected with industrial art."¹²⁶ Hector's argillite pipes may therefore have been exhibited as examples of, literally, carved argillite.

Scotland's national museum grew architecturally and collections-wise during the 1850s and 60s. With its buildings completed in 1864, the Industrial Museum was

¹²³ Superintendent Thomas Archer wrote that 1861 "has in all probability been the most important in the history of this museum," owing to the acquisition of collections, and property to house them. See Archer, "Appendix Y," in *Directory*, 175.

¹²⁴ Knowles, "'Objects as Ambassadors,'" in *Unpacking the Collection*, 231-248.

¹²⁵ Alexander Galletly, "Appendix AD," in *Directory*, 213. Galletly notes here that the death of the Museum's Director, George Wilson, prevented the completion of a full annual report.

¹²⁶ Thomas Archer, "Appendix CC," [1863] in *Directory*, 235-248.

renamed the Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art. Though Wilson's directorship was short-lived (he died in 1859) he managed to spend the summer of 1855 "visiting the museums of London and making himself familiar with their contents and arrangements."¹²⁷ Directors' visits to British and European museums continued through the 1860s, evidence of the international network of ethnographic collecting of which the Museum was a part, and also of its presence in the world of museum research and exhibition, networks that the NMS continues to be a part of today. This museum has always participated in international and intercultural networks around objects, and the character of these networks has changed along with shifting debates in museum anthropology.

Hector's donation would remain the Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art's only argillite collection until the 1890s, when the Museum purchased two lots in 1890 and 1896.¹²⁸ In 1880, several argillite pieces visited the Museum as part of the William Bragge collection loan, which consisted of over 7000 specimens illustrating the use of tobacco and other kinds of narcotics. A guide to this collection promoted it as unique and original, having never before been displayed on account of its large size. To the thoughtful observer, the guide noted, the exhibition was to be recognized for having

¹²⁷ Wilson, "Annual Report," [1856] in *Directory*, 191.

¹²⁸ These objects are a ship panel pipe fragment and a Haida-themed cluster panel (A.1890.47 and A.1890.478).

“great ethnological value, while in many respects it is also remarkable for its illustrations of technical art.”¹²⁹

Indigenous-made pipes from North America occupied at least two cases. From Sitka, Alaska, there were several ship pipes carved from wood and whale’s bone, featuring cabin houses with glazed windows and human figures. This entry presumably referred to the type of carved wooden ship pipes such as that on display today in *Artistic Legacies* (Figure 4, no. 9). One display case was devoted to the “nearly 30 pipes from the North Pacific Coast, in black claystone or slate, carved with figures of men and animals in the most curious and grotesque manner.”¹³⁰ The exhibition, which seems therefore to have featured wooden and argillite ship pipe models, was reported to have “excited great public interest” among its audiences.¹³¹

Between 1890 and 1908 the Museum purchased nine pieces of argillite, almost all of them Haida-themed figures. The guidebooks of what was by then called the Royal Scottish Museum highlighted what were considered the most important groups of objects in each collection, and, like contemporary guidebooks, were intended to

¹²⁹ Thomas Archer, “Introduction,” in *Guide to the [Bragge] Loan Collection of Objects Connected with the use of Tobacco and other Narcotics*, Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art (Edinburgh: Neill and Company, 1880), 3.

¹³⁰ *Guide to Bragge Collection* (1880), 12-13.

¹³¹ Thomas Archer, “Appendix G,” in *Report to the Director of the Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art for the Year 1880*, in *Directory*, 562.

direct the visitor to what the museum considered “the most important groups of objects comprised in each collection.”¹³² Historical exhibition labels like those of today were intended to provide details on particular items.

Museum guidebooks tell us that from 1908 to 1935 there were no substantial changes to the interpretation and display of ethnographic objects.¹³³ During these years, the “Ethnographical” collection occupied twenty-eight cases in a first-floor gallery, grouped geographically. Beginning with Greenland, the cases were “devoted to the handiwork of the native races of the North American continent – Arctic, East and West Coast, and Inland.” Special attention was given to Inuit material culture, especially model canoes outfitted with objects required for a fishing expedition. The “remarkably fine North American Indian Dresses” filled thirteen cases, and one case exhibited the materials and tools used in weaving and porcupine quill-work. Another case housed a display of Indigenous North American pipes, including “specimens of the tomahawk pipe and the calumet of peace,” though no argillite pipes are mentioned in this guide.¹³⁴

¹³² Royal Scottish Museum, *Scotch Education Department*, “Preface” to *A Guide to the Collections* (Edinburgh: Morrison & Gibb Ltd., 1910), 3.

¹³³ See guidebooks for 1908, 1910, 1928 and 1935.

¹³⁴ The Royal Scottish Museum, *A Guide to the Collections* (Glasgow: James Hedderwick & Sons Ltd., 1908), 23.

In 1928 John Rae's collection, which included two argillite plates, arrived on long-term loan from the University of Edinburgh and was described in the 1929 Guide as a "valuable group of objects collected from the Eskimo and Indians of Canada."¹³⁵ Speaking to the assumption that Indigenous people were imperiled, these objects were deemed especially valuable for "illustrating the lives of the fast-disappearing North American Indians."¹³⁶

Argillite pipes were referred to in the 1928 guide to the Comparative Ethnography Gallery, located on the Museum's second floor. These galleries were "arranged on the lines adopted by the Horniman Museum, London, and the Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford," though the Scottish museum's exhibits were on a smaller scale.¹³⁷ The "specimens" on display in this gallery were arranged in groups to represent a range of human activities from prehistory to 1928, including Warfare, the Domestic Arts, Decorative Art and Magic. The objects were drawn from all over the world, arranged "according to the nature of their use" and were presented in evolutionary terms as "the products of people in various stages of civilization."¹³⁸ According to the

¹³⁵ The Royal Scottish Museum, *A General Guide to the Collections* (Edinburgh: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1929), 33.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ The Royal Scottish Museum, *Guide to the Gallery of Comparative Ethnography* (Edinburgh: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1928), 25-26.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 4.

guide, “the simple beginnings amongst primitive men of many of the highly-finished articles and appliances of civilized life are today made clear, and it is often possible to trace, stage by stage, the lines on which their evolution has proceeded.”¹³⁹ Argillite pipes were described in the “Narcotics and Stimulants” cases as the “elaborately carved slatestone pipes of the North-West Coast of America,” presented to illustrate their functional properties, and also to represent the smoking implements of “primitive” peoples.¹⁴⁰

By mid-twentieth century however, the idea that objects of Indigenous material culture represented peoples in an earlier phase of human development began to be challenged. As Clifford observes, the category of “primitive art” emerged “in the eyes of a triumphant modernism [in which] some [ethnographic] artifacts at least could be seen as universal masterpieces.”¹⁴¹ In Edinburgh in 1949, Royal Scottish Museum Assistant Keeper Cyril Aldred published “Primitive Arts of the South Seas.” This text reflects the development of similar ideas about Indigenous *art* trialed by Marius Barbeau of the National Museum of Canada from the late 1920s.¹⁴² Here, Aldred

¹³⁹ The Royal Scottish Museum, *Guide to the Gallery of Comparative Ethnography* (1928), 4.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

¹⁴¹ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1988), 228.

¹⁴² See Eric Brown and Marius Barbeau, *Exhibition of Canadian West Coast Art, Native and Modern* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1927).

writes of removing South Seas specimens from “the ethnological context in which they are usually shown,” to be arranged instead as works of art. Acknowledging the precocity of his proposal, he pointed out that it “may appear at first strange to a generation which, while it accepts much of the paintings of modern ‘primitives,’ is inclined to inherit certain prejudices that stand in the way of a just appreciation of primitive art.”¹⁴³ Challenging the exclusive Eurocentric categories of “art” and “artist,” Aldred was signalling a shift in how the decorated objects of other cultures could be interpreted and valued as art in the context of Scotland’s national museum.

If we were to map his ideas onto Clifford’s “art-culture system,” Aldred aimed to move objects considered part of collective and traditional cultures into the realm of the original and singular.¹⁴⁴ Today, contemporary Northwest Coast artists identify themselves by their Euro-Canadian/American and/or Indigenous names, and all of the artists I interviewed in B.C. sign their work. Additionally, art historians such as Robin K. Wright have worked to name or identify historical Haida artists through genealogical research and stylistic attribution, so that their individuality may be better known and understood.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Cyril Aldred, “Primitive Arts of the South Seas,” for the Arts Council of Great Britain’s Scottish Committee (1949), 3.

¹⁴⁴ Clifford, “the Art-Culture System,” in *The Predicament of Culture*, 224.

¹⁴⁵ Wright, *Northern Haida Master Carvers* (2001).

The way that Northwest Coast “art” was displayed and interpreted at the Royal Scottish Museum after the 1950s is traceable in a 1970s teacher’s guide to the “Traditional Art of America’s Northwest Coast.” Summarizing some of the distinctive characteristics of the art and cultures from this region, we see how argillite and other Northwest Coast works were conceptualized, valued and displayed:

In the Primitive Art Gallery, on the top floor, there is a display of smaller art objects. Amongst the carvings are masks, ceremonial and ritual objects such as rattles and charms, domestic utensils of wood and horn, pipe bowls, a bent wood storage box, and examples of argillite carving produced in the 19th century mainly for selling to Europeans.¹⁴⁶

Inverting earlier nineteenth century exhibition strategies that sought to represent the “fast-disappearing North American Indians,” this guide promoted the contemporaneity of Northwest Coast peoples and their cultural productions. It stated that, although the traditional art had been eroded by contact with Europeans, there were then in B.C. “a number of Northwest Coast Indian artists, carvers and painters, who keep alive traditional designs in all their traditional boldness.”¹⁴⁷ The pamphlet also highlighted the originality, strength and aesthetic prowess of Northwest Coast art. By the 1970s, the Museum was representing Northwest Coast cultures as alive and thriving, and their art as valuable for both its functional and aesthetic properties. That Northwest Coast

¹⁴⁶ Royal Scottish Museum, “Traditional Art of America’s Northwest Coast: Introductory notes for teachers” (Edinburgh: Royal Scottish Museum, Department of Education and Public Relations,” 1970s), 4.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 5.

art is made for use and for aesthetic appreciation characterizes the way it is valued today on the art market, in museums and galleries, as well as in Indigenous communities.

I have outlined the ways in which the NMS's Northwest Coast collections have been interpreted until the Museum's reopening in 2011. A recent museum guide, published shortly after its reopening, "highlights some special objects and their stories," including Singletary's *Trance* sculpture, which as noted is featured as a contemporary work of art stemming from living and longstanding Northwest Coast artistic traditions, again, a far cry from the trope of the "disappearing Indian."¹⁴⁸ At NMS today, Indigenous artists such as Singletary and D'Angeli are recognized as individual artists and representatives of their living cultures, an exhibition strategy that has emerged from many decades of debate around the status of Indigenous artistic productions.

As current Director Gordon Rintoul observes, the Museum's most recent transformation has "not only opened up the 19th century museum, but united it firmly with the adjacent 20th century building which tells the story of Scotland."¹⁴⁹ As this thesis shows, part of the story of Scotland is the global intercultural and intellectual

¹⁴⁸ National Museums Scotland, *National Museum of Scotland Guide* (Edinburgh: NMS Enterprises Ltd., 2012), 60.

¹⁴⁹ Rintoul, "Introduction," in *Ibid.*, 5.

networks its people have contributed to from the mid-nineteenth century to today.

Scotland's national museum has collected and displayed the material heritage of world cultures according to changing anthropological ideas, and continues to question the relationship between objects and people through the examination of art and material culture. Below, I consider the ways curators have displayed Northwest Coast art at the University of Aberdeen Museums, an institution that currently approaches the interpretation of its collections with a more localized but interdisciplinary focus.

2.5 The representation of Northwest Coast material heritage at the University of Aberdeen Museums

The history of what is now called the "University of Aberdeen Museums" is complex, covers nearly three centuries of collecting, and in its current form, represents collections from across the University's schools, including zoology, geology, herbarium, pathology and anatomy. King's, one of the UAM's museums, is the newest museum in Scotland, but is possibly also the oldest, as its origins date to a museum collection at King's College in 1727.¹⁵⁰ Situated on the University campus in Old Aberdeen, King's is an exhibition space to display the collections of the former Marischal Museum (now called the Collections Centre). Located in Aberdeen's city

¹⁵⁰ Neil Curtis, "100 Curiosities in King's Museum" Exhibition catalogue (University of Aberdeen, 2011), 1.

centre, Marischal College houses the Aberdeen City Council's Customer Service Centre, though as noted above, the Museum stores and galleries remain at that location as a research centre for University staff, students and outside researchers.

The University's human history collections include those of ethnography, archaeology, numismatics (the study of coins), fine art and history. Neil Curtis, who pulled together these diverse collections under the banner of Human Cultures, envisions the UAM's potential to develop a more interdisciplinary agenda, promote collaborative projects with University staff, and conceive of different ways to serve the University, which is the Museum's sole funder. Building from his predecessor Curator Charles Hunt's legacy of developing innovative exhibitions, Curtis seeks to develop the UAM's potential to carry out experimental projects. As a university museum, King's "doesn't have that sense of serving a defined community that a local authority museum might have, or a national museum." Rather, Curtis observes, "we can define [our community] much more fluidly, [and we] can try to do challenging things."¹⁵¹ King's Museum installs new exhibitions every few months and collaborates with academic staff and students so that current research reaches a broader audience more frequently. William Mitchell's *Beaver* pipe was featured as one of King's "100 Curiosities" in the Museum's 2011 exhibition of the same name, discussed below.

¹⁵¹ Neil Curtis. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Aberdeen, 26 February 2015.

Much of what is known as the “Mitchell collection,” which, in addition to the argillite pieces, includes masks and carved human figures, remains on display in a more recent version of 1995’s *Collecting the World* exhibition. As I discuss in more detail in Chapter 4, the Mitchell collection first appears in the 1887 catalogue of the Archaeological Museum of King’s College.¹⁵² Though his collection reappears in subsequent sources, such as 1912’s *Illustrated Catalogue*, the attributions of certain objects presumed collected by Mitchell are inconsistent.¹⁵³ We may therefore question whether Mitchell’s collection as it is embodied today represents his original donation, made sometime before or after his death in Victoria, B.C. in 1876. As Curtis points out, not all of the Northwest Coast items in the 1887 and 1912 catalogues now ascribed to him say “Presented by Captain Mitchell.”

Some do, some don’t...he has become seen as such an important collector, [but] I think that [certain objects] have been allocated to him on no evidence...Certainly, [in] Charles [Hunt’s *Collecting the World*] display in 1995 of Mitchell and his collection there’s material that I’m sure was not given by Mitchell. But, it was the sort of stuff that he would have collected.”¹⁵⁴

This thesis assumes that the consistency with which the majority of the argillite carvings attributed to Mitchell in both the 1887 and 1912 catalogues qualify them as

¹⁵² Charles Michie, *Catalogue of Antiquities in the Archaeological Museum of King’s College* (University of Aberdeen, 1887), 15-16.

¹⁵³ R.W. Reid, *Illustrated Catalogue of the Anthropological Museum* (University of Aberdeen: The University Press, 1912), 246-265.

¹⁵⁴ Neil Curtis. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Aberdeen, 26 February 2015.

part of his original donation.¹⁵⁵ As Curtis points out, Mitchell's importance as a collector derives from the fine quality of the works in his collection and from his biography, which is traceable through the decades of the Northwest Coast fur trade and into the early years of colonization in British Columbia. As University of Aberdeen anthropologist Alison Brown has pointed out, Mitchell is remembered for his involvement in a brief and unsuccessful gold rush on Haida Gwaii in the early 1850s, which resulted in skirmishes between Haidas and Euro-American traders over gold and property.¹⁵⁶ Mitchell has long been associated with this story, which, as I show in Chapter 4, is now attached biographically (though indirectly) to the objects he collected.

¹⁵⁵ Reid, *Illustrated Catalogue*, 259-260; Michie, *Catalogue of Antiquities*, 16. In Reid's catalogue, fourteen argillite works are attributed to Mitchell. Michie's catalogue attributes thirteen, where the missing item appears to be one of the pipes.

¹⁵⁶ Alison Brown, "William Mitchell," in *Material Histories: Scots and Aboriginal Peoples in the Canadian Fur Trade*, accessed 2 July 2015, <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/materialhistories/people.php?id=10>.



Figure 7. “100 Curiosities in King’s Museum” exhibition
University of Aberdeen Museums
Photo courtesy University of Aberdeen Museums

Most recently, two objects in Mitchell’s collection were featured as examples of King’s Museum’s “100 curiosities,” including the *Beaver* pipe and a Chilkat blanket (pictured on display in Figure 7). “100 Curiosities in King’s Museum” (2011) was Kings’ opening exhibit, and museum staff curated a display that could show the breadth of the collection in a limited space and foreground the museum’s multi-vocal approach to representation. “100 Curiosities” engaged with the longer history of the University’s museum collections as well as with the Renaissance idea and mode of display of the cabinet of curiosity. The exhibition was inspired by an older catalogue,

“List of Some of the Curiosities in the Museum of Marischal College,” and recalled earlier collections of various types of objects that would have been collected on exploration voyages from the sixteenth century onward. The exhibition was substantiated by the Museum’s strength in early modern history collections.¹⁵⁷

Unlike the private curiosity cabinets of powerful historical explorers and collectors, “100 Curiosities” took a multi-vocal, multi-storied approach, consulting “100 people, including students, academics, children, local people, donors and artists,” each of whom wrote 100 words on an object chosen from the University’s collections. “The idea of curiosity,” as the catalogue explains, “belongs in the minds of people, rather than in the objects.”¹⁵⁸ The exhibition challenged viewers to see the world from the perspectives of others through the diversity of objects represented. The objects and artworks were arranged in several cases and drawers in King’s small but bright exhibition space. A range of objects was displayed together, including scientific instruments, natural history specimens, objects of Indigenous peoples’ material heritage and European paintings. By not representing objects according to culture for example, the exhibition also sought to undermine established disciplinary categories or modes of representing artifacts.

¹⁵⁷ Neil Curtis. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Aberdeen, 26 February 2015.

¹⁵⁸ Curtis, “100 Curiosities” catalogue, 1.

Furthermore, as Curtis explained, the exhibition reacted against the British Museum's *History of the World in 100 Objects*, which sought to communicate two million years of world history through one hundred museum pieces.¹⁵⁹ Curtis was “reacting against the idea that you had one authoritative voice...I just don't buy that way of looking at history, I wanted to get many voices, so it was that background that led us to going out and approaching people to ask them to take part.”¹⁶⁰

Catalogue entries speak to the contemporary significance and symbolic weight of the Northwest Coast items on display. The clan crests of the Chilcat blanket's original owner, for example, are described as “sacred, inalienable property,” towards which false claims could result in death, historically, and negative social consequences today.¹⁶¹ An archaeology undergraduate student explained her decision to choose the *Beaver* pipe as one of King's 100 curiosities:

Not only were the Haida entertaining themselves whilst carving these animated figures, but they were also taking advantage of [the economic opportunities of] colonialism. [The *Beaver*] deserves a space in this exhibition not only because [works of argillite] were carved as ‘curio’ objects, but also because unlike most objects exhibited in the museum, these objects are representing ‘us’ and not ‘them.’¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ “A History of the World in 100 objects,” The British Museum, accessed 8 October 2015, http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/a_history_of_the_world.aspx.

¹⁶⁰ Neil Curtis. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Aberdeen, 26 February 2015.

¹⁶¹ Alex King, “Chilkat blanket, coastal Alaska, 1860,” in “100 Curiosities” catalogue, 29.

¹⁶² Lorena Bushell, “Pipe carved to represent a paddlewheel steamer,” in *ibid.*, 15.

As Curtis pointed out, “how the ‘other’ looks at us” is a post-colonial interest that re-values the “hybridized” products of Indigenous material cultures overlooked in earlier anthropological studies (or otherwise dismissed as “inauthentic”).

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has observed that ethnographic objects get reconstituted from curio to specimen to art, in various orders. Curiosities, she writes, “are anomalous; by definition they defy classification.”¹⁶³ As a label formerly applied to argillite carving and other Indigenous arts, “curiosity” may have pejorative historical associations, however as a label that can also “defy” established categories, it may function today as a framework through which to ask new questions of objects, and in the exhibition space, to facilitate an association between museum goers and objects in a way less structured by disciplinary boundaries. Engaging in historical traditions of collection and display, “100 Curiosities” also reclaimed curiosity as a mode of looking at things with an expanded worldview, and not as a pejorative label.

The character of the museum’s collections, its claim to being Scotland’s oldest museum, as well as the importance of people in the museum, contributed to “the personal quality of [this exhibition].” Staff were “politically trying to demonstrate how well-networked [the University of Aberdeen is], how many people had connections

¹⁶³ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, “Objects of Ethnography,” in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, eds. Ivan Karp and Steven Levine (Washington, Smithsonian Institution, 1991), 392.

with the museum, and who they were.”¹⁶⁴ As I show throughout this thesis, professional and social networks continue to inform how these historical collections were and are accessed, interpreted and understood.

2.6 *Ideas and exhibition strategies at the University of Aberdeen Museums, 1980s to 2000s*

In our interview, Curtis spoke of inheriting critical ideas and exhibition strategies from Hunt, under whom he worked from 1988 to 1998. Hunt’s two major exhibitions, *About Human Beings*, *About Being Human* (1985-1995) and *Collecting the World* (1995-present) were influential, innovative and attempted “to be critical [and] cross-cultural...not just [doing] things in a disciplinary or regional way.”¹⁶⁵ As Southwood has observed, the museum cases previously organized by curator and physical anthropologist Robert Reid in the early twentieth century remained “relatively stable and were not radically reorganized between 1907 and 1979,” when Hunt assumed the new position of professional Curator.¹⁶⁶ Haida collections included in Reid’s 1907 design were displayed in mahogany cases in the Museum’s North Gallery during these seven decades.¹⁶⁷ Figure 8 illustrates the Northwest Coast display

¹⁶⁴ Neil Curtis. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Aberdeen, 26 February 2015.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Southwood, “A cultural history,” 243.

¹⁶⁷ Though there were apparently no substantial changes to the way these objects were displayed, Curtis believes that Hunt possibly “tweaked” the arrangement of the objects in the Haida cases during his tenure as curator.

cases as they appeared from c. 1907-1979. The *Beaver* pipe is visible at the bottom right of the argillite ship pipe display.



Figure 8. Northwest Coast display case c. 1907-1979

Marischal Museum

Photo by Ewen Mackie, c. 1979

Image courtesy University of Aberdeen Museums

As Southwood points out, Reid’s displays were informed by “the scientific investigation of humans, a belief in the role of empire, and national trends in museums

and academia.”¹⁶⁸ The museum cases, she argues, were arranged to look like photographs in which a “‘unified’ picture” of their subjects, arranged by geographical origin and the racial categories of the day, were visible.¹⁶⁹ Southwood’s argument interprets early twentieth century anthropological museum display cases as “framing” their subjects as in photographs to convey a picture of unity and coherence despite regional and cultural differences. Anthropologists at this time “saw racial categories underpinning human cultural difference,” which is what Reid apparently expressed in his arrangement of the North Gallery cases “almost like forty-two separate photographs, [conveying] the authority of the Museum and structur[ing] the visitors’ views of the Anthropological collections.”¹⁷⁰

This early to mid-twentieth century exhibition strategy in which collections reflected and celebrated ideas about the power of British empire, and which were organized around contemporary European racial theories, went basically unchallenged at the Aberdeen museum until Hunt became Curator in 1979. Hunt subsequently developed a reflexive and critical approach to representing British collecting practices. Curtis describes Hunt as a transitional figure in the Museum’s history, bridging “the

¹⁶⁸ Southwood, “A cultural history,” 243.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 248.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 247, 248, 249. See Southwood 241-307 for a detailed discussion of the Museum’s twentieth century exhibitions.

time when museums generally started thinking that there [were] other people [that would] have a stake [in the museum collections], rather than just seeing the collections as the ‘University’s treasures,’” an assumption evidently conveyed in a 1950s photograph of University students ironically modeling ethnographic hats in the Museum’s collections. Hunt’s exhibitions attracted visitors and scholars, and generally raised the profile of the museum more broadly so that, as Curtis points out, it is now “becoming part of the mainstream as one of the more significant [ethnographic] collections” in the UK.¹⁷¹

Ideas of the “hybrid,” the “transcultural” and the “intercultural” are relatively recent.¹⁷² The formal and aesthetic hybridity of the *Beaver* pipe and the other argillite pipes in Mitchell’s collection are evidence of the transcultural relationships between European and Haida figures and forms. Curtis suspects that the intercultural character of these pipes was perhaps what led to their exclusion from the Marischal Museum’s

¹⁷¹ Neil Curtis. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Aberdeen, 26 February 2015.

¹⁷² Homi Bhabha discusses hybridity as cultural negotiation and performance in *The Location of Culture*, 110-114. In *Trading Identities*, Phillips discusses the concept of “transculturation” as a “powerful tool for the analysis of art commodities, objects that characteristically take on hybrid forms in order to be economically and culturally viable.” *Trading Identities*, 17. Art historian Aldona Jonaitis observes that Glass, curator of *Objects of Exchange* (2011) “selected works that demonstrated the effects of the colonial encounter between Native and non-Native individuals. Including the intercultural dimensions of the objects greatly enhanced visitors’ understanding of Northwest Coast artworks by recounting their history more completely.” Jonaitis, “Museums and Northwest Coast Art,” in *Native Art of the Northwest Coast*, 762-763.

About Human Beings: About Being Human exhibition (1985-1995). In this largely functionalist exhibition other Northwest Coast pieces in the University's collections were used to represent anthropological categories such as chiefly power and Curtis suspects that at that time, "hybrid" objects were not seen to advance the ethnographic story the exhibition sought to tell.¹⁷³ In Hunt's subsequent exhibition, *Collecting the World* (1995 - present), which focused on the history of collecting, Mitchell's pipes "came in very significantly" for their representation of Scottish work and collecting abroad. This latter exhibition, as Curtis points out, still exists "in mothballed" form at the Marischal Museum's collections centre, where several argillite pipes are mounted in display cases (Figure 9).¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Neil Curtis. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Aberdeen, 26 February 2015. See also Southwood, "A cultural history," 282-283.

¹⁷⁴ Neil Curtis. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Aberdeen, 26 February 2015.



Figure 9. Mitchell's argillite pipes

On display, "Collecting the World," Marischal Museum

University of Aberdeen Museums

Photo by Kaitlin McCormick

Collecting the World, in which the work of Aberdonians in the British colonies was examined through the donated collections of alumni, "juxtaposes the 'mystery' and 'exoticism' of colonial adventures with comments on the effects and ethics of imperial cultural contact," a message "unspoken in ethnography museums until the 1990s."¹⁷⁵ Though as both Southwood and Curtis argue, exhibitions which foreground the story of the collection and the European collector, reflexive though they may be, risk occluding the voices of the descendants of those whose material heritage was collected.

¹⁷⁵ Southwood, "A cultural history," 298.

Curtis characterizes *Collecting the World* in recent museum history as being a fairly early exhibition that aimed to understand and critique the process of collecting.¹⁷⁶ Still, Curtis considers that one of the difficulties of the display was its attempt to engage – if critically – with the worldviews of nineteenth century collectors, whose motivations for acquiring particular objects was not always discernable through the relationship of objects on display in this exhibition.¹⁷⁷ Though Curtis recalled that *Collecting the World* was recognized as an innovative and creative move towards post-colonial museography, he acknowledged that post-colonial exhibition strategies which critically engage with collecting as a socialized practice risks “doubly muting” the voices of peoples whose cultural heritage forms the body of display. Drawing on perspectives from members of the University of Aberdeen community, Southwood observed that some visitors criticized this exhibition “because it seems to [have left] many cultural views unexamined...in the act of questioning Europe’s imperial contacts with the rest of the world, it simultaneously re-enact[ed] them, creating a potentially offensive display for some visitors.”¹⁷⁸ The voices of the descendants of colonized peoples from whom the objects were acquired were not represented in this exhibition.

¹⁷⁶ Neil Curtis. Interview with Kaitlin McCormick, Aberdeen, 26 February 2015.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. See also Southwood, “A cultural history,” 299.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 304.

As Shelley Ruth Butler has pointed out with reference to the Royal Ontario Museum's (ROM) controversial *Into the Heart of Africa* exhibition (1989-1990), narrating exhibition themes through the voices of collectors – despite the use of irony or other rhetorical devices as a critical and reflexive subtext – risks privileging “whiteness...[as a] master-text.”¹⁷⁹ Though Mitchell's own voice was not represented here (because he left no written records of his own), his story comes through, as Curtis points out, through the objects he collected. What fascinates Curtis about the *Beaver* carving, then, is also what troubles him. “One of the things that makes it attractive is [that] it's the story of the white man,” yet, as “cracked mirrors of ourselves,” the piece and its exhibition may straddle a thin line between post-colonial critique and European self-obsession.

Perhaps as Southwood has suggested, exhibitions like *Collecting the World* and the ROM's *Into the Heart of Africa* can be interpreted as “contact zones,” as spaces in which “power-charged set of exchanges, of push and pull” occur between times, cultures and people in the museum spaces.¹⁸⁰ Objects have also recently been conceptualized as contact zones, as they can be fraught sites around which the

¹⁷⁹ Shelley Ruth Butler, *Contested Representations: Revisiting “Into the Heart of Africa”* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 12.

¹⁸⁰ Clifford (1997:192), quoted in Southwood, “A cultural history,” 304.

dynamics of identity and ownership are at play and come into conflict.¹⁸¹ The meaning of objects, furthermore, changes over time. As I discuss in Chapter 5, the *Beaver* pipe did not elicit feelings of cultural connection for several Haida people I met in 2014. However Curtis, who has worked at the UAM for over twenty-five years, describes his own connection to this piece, seeing it as a powerful object in the history of Aberdeen.

If the *Beaver* pipe were requested for repatriation,

...it would be the one [piece] that I would find harder to repatriate, because its story and importance is so powerful here. So this weighing up of who it matters more to – [if] what you’ve said is that it probably doesn’t matter an awful lot to the Haida – but even if it did, it matters much more here than most of the collection does, so it’d be a much harder one to let go.¹⁸²

The Mitchell collection remains encased in the current iteration of *Collecting the World*, though the *Beaver* pipe had been removed for display at King’s College when I visited Aberdeen in 2012. As the UAM’s Haida object with perhaps the most active social life, this piece has been re-encoded there as representing aspects of Scottish history and cultural heritage. With research due to begin soon for the Haida Gwaii Museum’s projected exhibition on argillite ship pipes, it will interesting to see whether

¹⁸¹ Laura Peers and Alison Brown, *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003); see also Kramer, *Switchbacks* (2006).

¹⁸² Neil Curtis. Interview with Kaitlin McCormick, Aberdeen, 26 February 2015. Curtis anticipates a future request for Haida material given the Museum’s rising profile and the Haidas’ projected attentions towards claiming cultural objects following their completion of repatriations of ancestral remains from world museums.

this well-traveled piece will be brought back into the fold of Haida history, and whether it will be used to tell Haida stories from a Haida point of view.¹⁸³

2.7 Northwest Coast material heritage at the Perth Museum and Art Gallery

What is now called the Perth Museum and Art Gallery has been an intellectual and cultural hub in Perthshire since the late eighteenth century. The Museum's Northwest Coast collections are well known in circles of museum ethnography and since the 1990s, they have been on the radar of First Nations requesting information and contact with their material heritage abroad.¹⁸⁴ In November 2014 for example the Museum received Haida artist Jim Hart and his apprentices, who handled and studied several Haida works in PMAG's collections. The collections have been published to some degree in various sources, and have also been featured in recent online exhibitions and at museums outside of Perth.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Nika Collison. Email to Kaitlin McCormick 4 March 2015.

¹⁸⁴ Natalie Crosby-Fournier, former curator at Haida Gwaii Museum, Qay'lnagaay, to Mark Hall, Curator, Perth Museum and Art Gallery, 28 July 1998. In this letter, Ms. Crosby-Fournier requested information and photographs of the Museum's Haida objects.

¹⁸⁵ See Drew and Wilson, *Argillite: Art of the Haida*, 77, 152, 178, 179, 181, 182, 213; Dale Idiens, "Northwest Coast Artifacts in the Perth Museum & Art Gallery: The Colin Robertson Collection," *American Indian Art Magazine* 13 (1) (Winter 1987): 46-53; Macnair and Hoover, *The Magic Leaves* (1984), 33-34; Barbara Brotherton, *S'abadeb: The Gifts. Pacific Coast Salish Art and Artists* (Seattle: Seattle Art Museum, 2008); University of Aberdeen, *Material Histories*, accessed 26 October 2015, <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/materialhistories/>

Today, no Northwest Coast objects are on display in the Museum's galleries as its exhibitions focus mostly on Scottish topics.¹⁸⁶ According to Curator Mark Hall, Northwest Coast objects have been occasionally loaned out for exhibition to the British Museum, and the PMAG lent some Salish objects from the Robertson collection for the Seattle Art Gallery's exhibition *S'abadeb The Gifts: Pacific Coast Salish Art and Artists* (2008-2009). "We mostly make [the collections] accessible these days through access to researchers from indigenous communities and North American/Canadian universities," Hall commented. "Longer term we would like to see an exhibition here of some of this material, ideally in partnership with [the] NMS and/or indigenous [communities]."¹⁸⁷ The Museum encourages research visits from Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and researchers. The distribution of collections information is considered part of community engagement and is welcomed for its potential to improve the Museum's knowledge of its collections.

According to Hall, during the nineteenth and early twentieth century much of PMAG's world cultures collections went on display, but the Museum's records are poor and retain apparently no specific references to the exhibition of Haida material

¹⁸⁶ "Exhibitions," Perth Museum and Art Gallery, accessed 2 July 2015, <http://www.pkc.gov.uk/article/6674/Exhibitions>.

¹⁸⁷ Mark Hall, email to Kaitlin McCormick, 6 March 2015.

heritage.¹⁸⁸ Historical photographs of PMAG's rotunda, such as that pictured in Figure 10, show early twentieth century ethnographic displays, but they do not appear to show any distinctly Haida or Northwest Coast material.

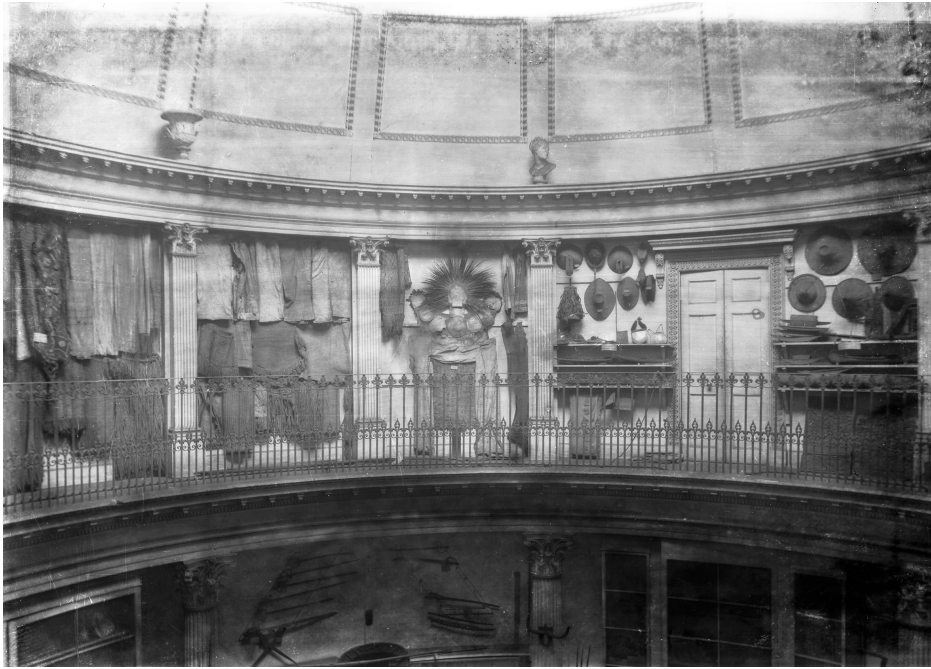


Figure 10. Rotunda of Perth Museum and Art Gallery, c. pre-1930s

Image courtesy Perth & Kinross Council

As Hall pointed out, Dale Idiens' collections catalogue (1978) represents nearly the extent of PMAG's knowledge of its foreign material. Still, the Museum has retained important records associated with the Robertson collection, which throw light on the kind of collector he was, a topic addressed in Chapter 4. Furthermore, the records of PMAG's predecessor, the Perth Literary and Antiquarian Society (PLAS), provide

¹⁸⁸ Mark Hall, email to Kaitlin McCormick, 6 March 2015.

insight into the intellectual and cultural context into which Robertson's donation arrived in the first half of the nineteenth century.

2.8 From antiquarian society to museum: a brief history of the Perth Museum and Art Gallery

Among PMAG's ethnographic collections are approximately 80 objects from the Northwest Coast of North America. Of these, 23 are attributed to Robertson's collection, which arrived in Perth in 1833. As I discuss in Chapter 4, two of PMAG's ten pieces of argillite carving apparently arrived with Robertson's donation, which also featured two more Northwest Coast stone pipes, though these are not carved of argillite.¹⁸⁹

Robertson's is apparently the earliest Northwest Coast collection to have reached this Museum, and has been described as one of the "most significant donations of ethnographic material made to the Literary and Antiquarian Society" of Perth.¹⁹⁰ This museum is the modern institution formed out of the PLAS, which was founded in 1784 by a group of Perth gentlemen who sought to create a similar organization to Edinburgh's Society of Antiquaries, founded in 1780.¹⁹¹ Through the nineteenth century, the Society received several donated collections of ethnographic

¹⁸⁹ Dale Idiens, *Catalogue of the Ethnographic Collection: Oceania, America, Africa* (Perth: Perth Museum and Art Gallery, 1979), 45-49.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, v.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, v.

and natural history objects from Perth natives who had traveled abroad, including Robertson.

The PMAG archives contain many interesting historical documents pertaining to the Museum's institutional history and collections. Museum files include more recent documents such as requests for collections information from Canadian First Nations groups, demonstrating the contemporary relevance of the Museum's collections to Indigenous source communities abroad, as well as the international legacies of global trade and colonialism and the roles of Scots in that work.

The "History of the Literary and Antiquarian Society of Perth" (1881) details its administrative, intellectual and collections developments from the Enlightenment through Victorian times, and outlines its central purpose as an educational institution. As the "central depository" for the accumulation of antiquities and numismatics, natural history specimens and art works, the Society and its museum "endeavored to make the most of its collections in the way of exercising an educational influence on the community."¹⁹² This institution emerged from the values and principles of the

¹⁹² Perth Literary and Antiquarian Society, *History of the Literary and Antiquarian Society of Perth, and the Extension of the Perth Museum* (Perth: Perth Literary and Antiquarian Society, 1881), 3-4.

Scottish Enlightenment, in which the moral and practical purposes of learned societies were geared towards the education of the individual and society at large.¹⁹³

There is no doubt that the Provincial Museum, like those in the capitals, legitimately affords, at various times, rational amusement to the public... The collection and preservation of objects of various kinds for the intellectual improvement of the community was one of the earliest features in the history of the Society.¹⁹⁴

The PLAS was devoted to the pursuit of scholarship and intellectual interests and emerged from a developing culture of educated middle and upper class Perthshire citizens who wished to cultivate for themselves a provincial intellectual hub modeled on the societies established in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen. One of its founders, the antiquarian James Scott, envisaged the Perth institution as an “intellectual society that would allow local gentlemen to work collaboratively toward preserving Scotland’s heritage and, more widely, advancing modern learning.”¹⁹⁵ As I discuss in Chapter 4, Robertson’s donation can be read in this cultural context; furthermore, the status he attempted to cultivate in the Canadian fur trade shows him to have been an intercultural man straddling both Scottish and Indigenous fur trade societies.

¹⁹³ Stewart Sutherland, “Scottish Enlightenment,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed 8 January 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/529682/Scottish-Enlightenment/261867/Legacy>.

¹⁹⁴ PLAS, *History*, 5, 8.

¹⁹⁵ David Allan, “Scottish Enlightenment and the Politics of Provincial Culture: The Perth Literary and Antiquarian Society, ca. 1784 – 1790,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 27 (3) (2003), 5.

Perth during the early eighteenth century was an emerging merchant society and developing urban and commercial centre. Unlike Edinburgh, Glasgow, St Andrews and Aberdeen, Perth was without a university so, according to Allan, it lacked the “leading minds” of the larger Scottish cities.¹⁹⁶ Still, the Society while “lacking either the depth of patronage or the institutional foundations to sustain a significant professional intelligentsia,” nonetheless allowed its members “the opportunity to combine patriotism, sociability, and the cultivation of learned interests.”¹⁹⁷

While the Society had accumulated antiquarian literature and artifacts from its beginning in the late eighteenth century, the PLAS’s records show an influx of donations in the early decades of the nineteenth century from Perth natives stationed abroad as civil servants and merchants. Though Robertson’s may be one of the oldest Northwest Coast fur trade collections in Scotland, as a collector he was not unique among his contemporaries, as other Perthshire men were also sending ethnographic collections from their respective stations in the wider world. Donation letters of the 1820s and 30s allude to the Society’s aforementioned purposes.

¹⁹⁶ Allan, “Scottish Enlightenment,” 3-5.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 5.

For example, a Perthshire-born civil surgeon stationed in Persia wrote to the Society in 1830 introducing, among other things, a set of Persian bagpipes, which he described as a degenerate version of the Scottish pipes. This donor forwarded his collection “for the acceptance of the Perth Antiquarian Society the few trifling articles enumerated above,” and wished that the Society would “receive the present as a proof of my desire to contribute to its Museum, [and that] it [would] be a source of gratification to me when any other opportunity offers of enabling me to add my note to the Antiquarian Stores with which my native City is already enriched.”¹⁹⁸ This letter is written in similar terms to Robertson’s, suggesting that collectors donated foreign objects to enrich their reputations at home and for the benefit of their local learned societies. Early nineteenth century collectors’ letters offered descriptive observations of the technologies and arts of the peoples from whom they collected. These letters show collectors to have been generally ambivalent towards the value of the objects they presented, which they saw as interchangeably ingenious and degenerate. In subsequent chapters, I comment on this ambivalence, which characterizes early ethnological-type descriptions of objects including argillite carving.

¹⁹⁸ Riach, to Perth Literary and Antiquarian Society, 6 January 1830, Archive 43. List of MSS and Objects Donated 1785-1892, Perth Literary and Antiquarian Society archives, Perth Museum and Art Gallery.

In his donation letter, Robertson referred to his collection of natural history and ethnographic items as an assemblage of curiosities, which was also how it was entered into the PLAS register.¹⁹⁹ Although the Museum has several ethnographic collections, some PLAS records, such as the 1881 *History*, do not refer to the Society as having had any particular interest in ethnographic collecting, as the collection of Scottish antiquities and natural history in particular was more important through the early decades of the nineteenth century. Though Robertson's is counted today as one of the oldest Scottish collections of Northwest Coast material heritage, it was only mentioned once in the *History* as part of a growing collection of early nineteenth century ethnological material.²⁰⁰ Earlier records, such as the Society's "Preliminary Discourse" (1784) do not indicate interest in ethnological objects. Rather, the Society's main purpose was the investigation of Scottish history, antiquities and natural history.²⁰¹

Pre-dating the profession of anthropology by half a century, Robertson's collection would have given the Perth Society some insights into the arts and technologies of a faraway and foreign people. Recent research into the efforts of

¹⁹⁹ Letterbook, Perth Literary and Antiquarian Society, Archive 38, PMAG.

²⁰⁰ PLAS, *History*, 29.

²⁰¹ Literary and Antiquarian Society of Perth, "Preliminary Discourse delivered to the Institution of a Literary Society at Perth, December 16, 1784," (Edinburgh: J. Pillans & Sons, Lawnmarket, 1807), 1, 15-16.

painter and performer George Catlin to make Indigenous cultures known to British audiences in larger metropolitan centers in the 1830s and 40s gives us some idea of how Robertson's collection may have been understood in Perth in his own day.

Though the 1830s and 40s was a collecting period that "preceded the formal institution of ethnographic and anthropological museum displays," it was also a time when the rhetoric of the "disappearing Indian" began to appear, and Pratt suggests that Catlin himself may have experimented with a "proto-typology" in his display of Indigenous artifacts in London and other British cities.²⁰² Still, the "field of ethnography was still in its infancy in the 1840s and most collections of Indigenous artefacts were based on the older model of the cabinet of curiosity."²⁰³ As I show in Chapter 4, though Robertson described his collection as curiosities, he did not portray the Salish peoples from whom the objects originated as disappearing.

J.C.H. King has observed that in Britain, ethnographic interest emerged from a context of commercial exploitation and was intended to educate the public about the lifestyles and customs of foreign peoples. In the early nineteenth century, few anthropological forerunners were interested in material culture, and "artefacts were deposited in museums and arranged to show the different arts and crafts of

²⁰² Stephanie Pratt, "Objects, Performance and Ethnographic Spectacle," *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 15 (2) (2013), 273-279.

²⁰³ Ibid., 277.

mankind.”²⁰⁴ As discussed above with reference to the history of exhibition at the NMS, the interest in other cultures had developed more seriously by the middle of the nineteenth century, “largely as an adjunct of archaeology in an attempt to illustrate the previous stages in man’s evolution.”²⁰⁵ With the development of anthropology as a professional discipline in the late nineteenth century, scholarly interest in early ethnographic collections began to take shape, especially in relation to a growing anxiety around the presumed decline of Indigenous cultures. We might assume that the Perth Museum followed established interpretive and exhibitionary strategies of the metropolitan Scottish institutions.

2.9 Conclusion

These Scottish museums have engaged with previous modes of display of the collected objects of Indigenous peoples. At the NMS, current exhibition strategies emphasize the continuity of Northwest Coast cultures through the display of historical objects with the message that material culture has ongoing significance in contemporary Indigenous source communities. Through the representation of contemporary art and artists, the exhibits also convey the multiple ways that Northwest Coast art can be

²⁰⁴ J.C.H. King, *Artificial Curiosities from the Northwest Coast of America: Native American Artifacts in the British Museum collected on the Third Voyage of Captain James Cook and Acquired through Sir Joseph Banks* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1981), 11.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 11.

known and appreciated, as noted by Kramer at the beginning of this chapter. No longer are objects seen to represent “disappearing” cultures or societies, but they are used to show how traditional ways of life are enduring and inventive.

At the UAM, recent exhibitions featuring Northwest Coast art have interrogated the historical collecting practices of Aberdonians in the wider world as well as, more generally, paradigms of collecting and display in the western tradition. By engaging in the “curiosity” (and “hybridity”) of objects, the Museum, as Curtis pointed out, has taken a more experimental approach to the interpretation of their collections. In Perth meanwhile, the PMAG’s collections attract international visitors, including First Nations artists and researchers, so while its Northwest Coast collections are not currently on display their social lives continue through tactile engagements with artists and researchers.

I introduced this chapter with a discussion of hybridity, which describes objects that are evidence of transcultural processes. The collections under investigation here emerged in a dynamic context of trade, travel and cultural exchange on the Northwest Coast of North America in the mid-nineteenth century. Since then, they have been wrapped as hybrid objects, narrative objects, authentic objects, and as objects of science, ethnography, art, and biography. With its investigation of trade relations between Indigenous people and newcomers to the Northwest Coast, Chapter

3 investigates the relationships and circumstances that led to the production and collection of these argillite carvings from the contact zone.

Chapter 3: Dynamics of trade and exchange on the northern Northwest Coast, 1820s-1860s

3.1 Introduction

Fur trade histories, constructed from various textual, oral and visual accounts, are partial, contested and unresolved. The relationship between the HBC and Haida people was ambivalent, and in the big picture, brief. The four decades in which these collections of Haida argillite carvings were formed and relocated to Scottish museums though briefer still, provide a fascinating window into the dynamics of social, cultural and economic exchange on the mid-nineteenth century Northwest Coast, preceding the colonial period. This chapter invokes Pratt's idea of contact zones, "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power," to describe intercultural interactions at key sites of exchange on the Northwest Coast.²⁰⁶ It describes the character of exchange at particular trading sites from the 1820s to the 1860s, and aims to show through the analysis of objects and textual documents, the ambivalent relationship between Indigenous people and Europeans at this time.²⁰⁷ This context, in turn, will provide a

²⁰⁶ Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," 33-40. See also Pratt, *Imperial Eyes* (1992).

²⁰⁷ For further comments on the ambivalent relationship between natives and newcomers, see Glass, *Objects of Exchange*, 14-18.

backdrop to better understand how the objects of others shifted in value and status during these decades, a discussion I develop in Chapter 4.

Glass has described the early colonial period on the Northwest Coast (beginning circa the late 1840s and 1850s) as “a ‘middle ground’ in which people met to exchange objects and ideas, a ‘contact zone’ in which foreign cultures collided and colluded, a ‘grinding edge’ along which intercultural friction caused both destructive tension and productive complicity.”²⁰⁸ The following discussion addresses the context of intercultural exchange during the decades between European exploration (circa 1770s-1790s) and professional museum collecting (circa 1870-1930) on the Northwest Coast as similarly dynamic.²⁰⁹ Preceding colonization proper, the years of the land-based fur trade could be described as a “mutually beneficial economic symbiosis” between Indigenous and European agents, both of whom benefitted from the exchange of materials, language and ideas.²¹⁰ In his memoir of a journey up the Northwest Coast in 1841, George Simpson, the governor of the HBC’s Northern Department, described the dynamic character of the fur trade:

²⁰⁸ Glass, *Objects of Exchange*, 7.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 6; Jacknis, “From Explorers to Ethnographers,” in *Native Art of the Northwest Coast*, 46.

²¹⁰ Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict: Indian-European Relations in British Columbia, 1774-1890* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992), 47; Glass, *Objects of Exchange*, 15; Cole Harris describes the Indigenous-European fur trading relationship as an “unequal symbiosis.” *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002), 54.

Our bateau carried as curious a muster of races and languages as perhaps had ever been congregated within the same compass in any part of the world. Our crew of ten men contained Iroquois, who spoke their own tongue; a Cree, half-breed of French origin, who appeared to have borrowed his dialect from both his parents; a North Briton, who understood only the Gaelic of his native hills; Canadians who, of course knew French; and Sandwich Islanders, who jabbered a medley of Chinook, English, &c., and their own vernacular jargon. Add to all this, that the passengers were natives of England, Scotland, Russia, Canada, and the Hudson's Bay territories: and you have the prettiest congress of nations, the nicest confusion of tongues, that has ever taken place since the days of the Tower of Babel. At the native camp, near which we halted for the night, we enriched our museum with one variety more, by hiring a canoe, and its complement of Chinooks, to accompany us.²¹¹

Absent from Simpson's vivid description of the Northwest Coast fur trade's diverse linguistic and cultural landscape are references to the tensions and violence of the fur trade era, told today in contemporary First Nations peoples' stories such as Captain Gold's, below. Violent incidents are also documented in the daily fort records of the HBC. Simpson's celebration of linguistic exchange in his *Narrative* contrasts with his notes and correspondence, which are blunt, acerbic and often racist. This difference illuminates the contradictions and ambivalence of Indigenous-European relations that characterize the fur trade and the colonial period that followed.²¹² Based mainly on the

²¹¹ George Simpson, *Narrative of a Journey Round the World, during the years 1841 and 1842* (London: Henry Colbourn, Publisher, Great Marlborough Street, 1847), 176.

²¹² Aaron Glass, *Objects of Exchange*, 18. According to historian Morag MacLachlan, "Simpson has been described by biographers as very energetic and innovative, as a man who simply followed orders, as cold and harsh, and as a 'man of feeling.'" *The Fort Langley Journals, 1827-30* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998), 5. In an 1831 letter to J.G. McTavish (chief factor at Moose Factory), Simpson mocked Colin Robertson's wife: "Robertson brought his bit of Brown with him to the Settlement this Spring in

post, ship, and correspondence records of HBC officials during these decades, this chapter constructs an (if partial) historical context for the circulation of argillite carving now at museums in Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Perth from the 1820s to 1860s. Each section describes the character of intercultural interactions in the 1820s, 1830s and 40s, and 1850s and 60s, and will introduce each museum collection (to be discussed further in Chapter 4), in its temporal context.

3.2 Ways of seeing and knowing

I became aware of the mixed legacy of the HBC through conversations with Haida people during my fieldwork on Haida Gwaii. While some felt strongly about the HBC's negative impact on Indigenous peoples through unfair trading strategies and their alleged spread of disease, I inferred from other interlocutors' indifference towards the topic that HBC history in relation to Haida Gwaii was marginal. Perusing the booklet of images of the Scottish museums' argillite collections that I had brought

the hopes that she would pick up a few English manners before visiting the civilised world; but it would not do – I told him distinctly that the thing was impossible which mortified him exceedingly.”

Robertson's wife, Theresa Chalifoux, was Métis. Letter, Simpson to McTavish, 15 August 1831. Search File, “Colin Robertson,” B.135/c/2, HBCA.

to our meeting at the Kay Centre in Skidegate, Captain Gold, a Haida historian consultant and artist, shared his understanding of the ship panel pipe pictured below.²¹³



Figure 11. Argillite ship pipe

University of Aberdeen Museums

Collected by Captain William Mitchell

ABDUA: 5560

34 cm x 11.4 cm x 1.3 cm

Photo by Kaitlin McCormick, courtesy University of Aberdeen Museums

In the old stories, [fur traders]...would take the chief and tie him up and demand ransom, 'bring me all the furs in the village! Or the chief will die.' And that kind of story [is] not what the Hudson's Bay [Company] would tell you. They got a real bad history. And so the people illustrated here, that could be this chief, tied up, [in that way] they did hold quite a few people; [the villages of] Cumshewa have got a story like that, Kiusta have got a story like that, Skidegate had a story like that...where they tied the chief up, held him for ransom, until all the furs were exhausted out of the village, and they let him go. That's probably what's illustrated here.²¹⁴

²¹³ See Captain Gold's webpage, "Haida art for sale: for the serious collector," accessed 21 November 2014. <http://www.qcislands.net/captgold/>

²¹⁴ Captain Gold. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Skidegate, 3 April 2014.

The difference between Captain Gold's and my interpretation of this fascinating piece is informed by different sets of knowledge, experience and ways of looking. Based on my reading of art historical texts, as well as the trade journals of the HBC's Fort Simpson, I suggested that the pipe represented a European trader being caught in a ship's rope, an event not uncommonly documented in HBC fort logs including those at Fort Simpson, a trade hub routinely visited by Haidas since the 1830s.²¹⁵

The carving depicts, from left to right, a bird that perches on a circular object, against which crouches a human figure whose neck is tied with a rope. This figure holds up the rope, while the human sitting across from him is turned the other way, and though a section of this piece is missing, we can see that he too holds a section of rope above his extended leg. Separating this scene from the second half of the carving is a cabin-like structure, out of which projects a broken section that appears to have represented a wooden part of a ship, possibly a yardarm. Atop this piece with its beak resting on the cabin is a bird's head. To the right of the cabin sit two more human figures. Their arms crossed, they appear to be sharing a bottle.

²¹⁵ For example, the Fort Simpson logbook for 31 July 1838 documents an accident upon the steamship *Beaver* in which one of the ship's stokers "got caught in some parts of the machinery...and had his jaw broke, and his ear and the flesh on one side of his face nearly torn off, he very narrowly escaped having his head crushed and being killed on the spot." B.201/a/4, HBCA. For examples of other (though possibly earlier) ship pipes depicting ship's rigging, see McManus Museum ship panel pipe 1959-540; British Museum pipes Am,De.25 and Am,Dr. 20; Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology pipe D 1921.201B.

Wright, Macnair and Hoover have provided us with a set of visual tools with which we may make meaning from the activities depicted here, or from the pipe's component parts. We can call this figure a ship pipe because (in addition to its mouthpiece and bowl) it fulfills two of Wright's criteria for this category: it has a baseline that represents the hull of a ship and a central cabin structure, which may represent either a nautical or land-based cabin.²¹⁶ The arm that projects from the central cabin is decorated with a scrolled leaf design typically seen on ships' billetheads and trailboards, and is visible on several other examples of argillite ship pipes.²¹⁷ Floral motifs, including those on the extended arm, and on the base of the ship also occur in the form of berries, which apparently double here as the tail feathers of the raven figure perched on top of the circular abstracted paddle wheel design.²¹⁸ This, as I discuss below, may be taken as a visual pun. Such floral motifs, Wright observes, also visible on eighteenth and nineteenth century ships "must [also] have

²¹⁶ Wright, "Haida Argillite Pipes" (1980), 41, 47. In this article, Wright comments that some ship pipes have cabins that do not appear to be based on ships' cabins "but rather on actual houses or blockhouses such as might have been observed at the Hudson's Bay Company's posts which were springing up along the northern coast from 1831 on."

²¹⁷ Macnair and Hoover, *The Magic Leaves* (1984), 59.

²¹⁸ Captain Gold identified the bird as a raven. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Skidegate, 3 April 2014.

been one source for these [argillite pipe] designs,” for which “the decorative woodworking on other parts of these ships was predominantly floral.”²¹⁹

The abstracted paddle wheel at the front of the ship pipe is likely based on the steamship imagery that Wright notes Haida artists “almost immediately” began incorporating onto ship pipes, “sometimes even including details such as undulating lines to indicate the wave action caused by the paddle wheels.”²²⁰ Though this piece does not depict water at the hull of the ship, another pipe in the Aberdeen collection (ABDUA:5561, pictured at bottom in Figure 9) appears to represent abstract waves in the form of sharply incised double triangles, perhaps indicating tumultuous waters, given the turbulent postures of the seven human figures aboard. As Wright has noted, the most direct source for the ship pipe motifs “must have been the paddle wheels and decorative woodworking on the ships which were present on the coast at the time of the carving.”²²¹

Noting that ships’ rigging frequently appears in the ship pipe genre, Macnair and Hoover have also suggested that the “lanceolate leaves and berries” motif featured on some ship pipes refer to the act of smoking tobacco, introduced to the Haida by

²¹⁹ Wright, “Haida Argillite Pipes” (1979), 43.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid., 47.

Europeans. Prior to the arrival of Europeans, the Haida chewed a native tobacco, which they mixed with lime made from burned and crushed clamshells.²²² A drawing of the native tobacco by a Captain Klue (1897) resembles the leaves and berries seen carved on several pipes; though the leaves are absent in the piece pictured above, the berries which double as the raven's tail feathers have been carved in that form and style.²²³ In Haida mythology, Raven introduced one form of the tobacco plant to Haidas, whereas Europeans brought another. Macnair and Hoover suggest that it is the tobacco plant that is conveyed in many of these European-inspired pipes, for its association with goods brought by Europeans.²²⁴

What story does this carving tell? No definite answer can be given here.

Wright, Macnair and Hoover have commented on the Haidas' fascination with Europeans and their material culture.²²⁵ Wright has also pointed out the "humorous quality" of Euro-Americans' activities as they have been depicted on ship pipes.²²⁶ Still, the imagery on this piece may denote events more closely associated with death.

²²² Wright, "Haida Argillite Pipes" (1979), 40.

²²³ This drawing is reproduced in Macnair and Hoover, *The Magic Leaves* (1984), 66.

²²⁴ Ibid., 59. Robert Bringhurst has pointed out that in the Haida poet Skaay's fourth movement of the epic poem *Raven Traveling*, it is Raven's second wife, Cloud Woman, who brings the tobacco seeds from the mainland to Haida Gwaii, which Raven's sister plants. *A Story As Sharp as a Knife: The Classical Haida Mythtellers and Their World* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1999, 2011), 292.

²²⁵ Macnair and Hoover, *The Magic Leaves* (1984), 59; Wright, "Haida Argillite Pipes" (1979), 41.

²²⁶ Ibid., 41.

As both Wright and archaeologist George MacDonald have shown, “tobacco smoking as a mourning ritual was incorporated by...the Haida...in their funeral feasts.”²²⁷

Though this pipe is drilled from its small mouthpiece at the stern end of the ship to the bowl at the top right corner of the cabin, it was likely not intended for smoking, but carved for display. Still, the imagery portrayed, from the raven with its tobacco-leaf tail, and the imminent hanging of one of the human characters, suggests the theme of death. Was this piece meant to convey meaning to its European collector, or only to Haidas, or was it intended to be intelligible to both kinds of audience? As I show in this chapter, on the Northwest Coast, the middle decades of the nineteenth century saw a diversity of languages, cultures, worldviews and spiritual beliefs that came into contact in ways that were complementary, conflicted, ambivalent and inherently dynamic.

3.3 *Recording events*

“In the absence of documentary records, the major source for the investigation of Aboriginal points of view must be the objects themselves.”²²⁸

Documenting the character of relationships between HBC officials and Indigenous traders, HBC records also convey the high esteem with which the

²²⁷ Here, Wright cites Turner and Taylor (1972: 252) and Fladmark (1973). Wright, “Haida Argillite Pipes” (1979), 40; see also George MacDonald, *Haida Art* (Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1996), 94.

²²⁸ Phillips, *Trading Identities*, 10.

Company held itself in these relations through its tenure as a trade monopoly on the Northwest Coast. Company officers, wrote Scottish chief factor WF Tolmie in 1866, “know as a rule they are liked and trusted by the natives, towards whom their policy is, and has been, one of justice and humanity.”²²⁹ Still, the trade could be brutal and by the time the first HBC ship reached the waters of Haida Gwaii in 1825, there was already a decades-long history of violence on the coast. “All of the sea traffic that converged on Haida Gwaii during the 1790s,” writes Wright, “led, perhaps inevitably, to several violent incidents. Often the fur traders would hold one of the native people on board as a hostage to assure that his fellow villagers would return to trade.”²³⁰

The threat of death by hanging was made even to the powerful northern Haida chief Albert Edward Edenshaw (gwaaygu 7anhlan) when he was employed as a pilot on the H.M.S. *Virago* as the British ship explored the Queen Charlotte Islands in 1853. Edenshaw, who by this time had earned a reputation as an influential, if duplicitous “man of leadership and capability,” was threatened with hanging from the ship’s yardarm, both by the crew and by an HBC trader on board, were he to ground the

²²⁹ Letter, W.F. Tolmie to William Duncan, 28 May 1866. B.226/b/2, HBCA. MacLachlan has commented that, “any unprovoked insult or abuse of the Natives would have been a serious breach of Hudson’s Bay Company policy.” *The Fort Langley Journals*, 213.

²³⁰ Wright, *Northern Haida Master Carvers*, 72.

ship.²³¹ These threats were made in a spirit of distrust following Edenshaw's suspected involvement with the Massett Haidas' raid on the American ship *Susan Sturgis* on Haida Gwaii's north coast one year earlier.²³² This incident, recorded in numerous European accounts, became known as a notorious affair.²³³ Given Wright's suggestion that the Mitchell ship pipe collection dates to the mid-1850s, it is tempting to speculate whether the imagery on this ship was related to this series of events.

In looking at this ship carving, both Captain Gold and I sought to make sense of it historically. Whereas Captain Gold's narrative illustrated a darker side of HBC-Haida history, highlighting instances of violence and inequality, I presumed that this carving represented the perils of fur trade life based on characterizations of the trade as a more or less symbiotic relationship in the history of Indigenous-European interactions.²³⁴ Certainly both interpretations were politically charged, but my way of seeing this object was informed by my reading of HBC records as primary sources and reflected my ignorance of Haida versions of this history. As Berger has observed, "the

²³¹ Henry Trevan, "The Diary of Surgeon Henry Trevan, R.N., in H.M.S. *Virago*," MG 24 F40, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa, 1852-54. Cited in Barry M. Gough, "New Light on Haida Chiefship: The Case of Edenshaw 1850-1853," *Ethnohistory* 29 (2) (1982): 131-139, 135-136.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ See for example Fisher, *Contact and Conflict* (1992).

way we see things is affected by what we know and what we believe.”²³⁵ The subjective and mutable way that we see and know things is an important theme in Chapter 5.

The work of several scholars may help us to understand Haida carvers’ motivations for producing such curious imagery, the reasons these works appealed to mid-nineteenth century collectors, and the ways in which they are made meaningful today. “Depictions of seamen and white people on ships were popular genres of argillite carving in the middle period [of this art tradition], perhaps because the sailors and tourists who bought these pipes were attracted to the exotic representations of themselves.”²³⁶ Haida artist Reg Davidson expressed a similar view. Davidson commented that Haida artists’ portraiture skills would have appealed to foreigners keen to take away skillfully carved images of themselves rendered in a foreign medium and style. From the Haida perspective, Davidson reflected that he “could see [Haida artists] documenting the stuffy Brits who were discovering us,” and laughed at the notion that Haidas “got discovered.”²³⁷

²³⁵ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972), 8.

²³⁶ LM, “Pipe,” in Glass, *Objects of Exchange*, 156.

²³⁷ Reg Davidson. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Old Massett, 25 April 2014.

For the sojourners who arrived to the Coast in the nineteenth century, Indigenous art commodities, as Phillips argues, were attractive both because of their “formal and technical refinement and because their iconographic features and materials led buyers to identify them as specifically Indian.” Their marketability “depended on their success in conveying recognizable – and acceptable – concepts of difference.”²³⁸ By the mid-nineteenth century, argillite carving had drawn a number of published commentary by newcomers or visitors to the coast who were impressed with the skill of the carvings, but who also found their imagery unsettling.

We may never know what meanings this piece held for Mitchell as the collector, nor the story originally intended by the carver. Furthermore, it is unclear even whether the human figures depict Haidas or Europeans, since it is known that Haidas had adopted European clothing and hairstyles by this period. Edenshaw for example, observed British paymaster William Henry Hills, “wears his hair in European style...[and was] always dressed neatly...[in] blue cloth traveling cap, white shirt, and black silk handkerchief, blue cloth monkey jacket, white waistcoat, blue cloth trousers and boots; and every article as if made for him.”²³⁹ As Wright has pointed out, at the time that these pieces depicting so-called Euro-Americans were

²³⁸ Phillips, *Trading Identities*, 9.

²³⁹ Hills 1853:217-19, in Gough, “New Light on Haida Chiefship,” 137.

carved, Haidas were experiencing economic and cultural growth as the European tools obtained through the fur trade enabled carving to be completed faster and on a larger scale. The wealth generated in Haida communities through the fur trade also stimulated more frequent potlatching and pole-raising. Perhaps these carvings were not primarily intended to mock Europeans and their strange ways, but to illustrate how Haidas “rapidly adopted [foreign] objects as prestige items. To be dressed in European fashions was considered highly desirable.”²⁴⁰ For this reason, Wright has suggested that many of the female figures found on argillite ship pipes may actually represent Aboriginal women in Euro-American clothing.²⁴¹ If this is true of the women depicted on these pipes, it may also be true of some of the male figures.

These kinds of objects may have documented the European other, or, in light of Wright’s reading, they might be examples of “autoethnography,” a concept describing a process of self-representation through which marginalized people engage with the cultural references of powerful others. Such objects (texts, for Pratt), “involve more than one language,” and, as they are addressed to both others and the members of their own communities, “their reception is thus highly indeterminate.”²⁴² Artist and

²⁴⁰ Robin K. Wright, “The Depiction of Women in Nineteenth Century Haida Argillite Carving,” *American Indian Art Magazine* 11 (4) (Autumn 1986), 43.

²⁴¹ Ibid. 40.

²⁴² Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone,” 2.

scholar Marianne Nicholson (of Kwakwaka'wakw and Scottish heritage) describes autoethnography as “the act of telling one’s own story [which] was an act consistent with traditional cultural norms and deeply rooted in the creative production of material culture.”²⁴³ Concepts like autoethnography and the “ambivalence” of colonial interactions are of course post-colonial ways of looking at these objects, which no doubt were intended to communicate specific stories and meanings in their own times. Today, we consider these things as evidence of the ambiguity and ambivalence of intercultural encounters, emerging as they did from a dynamic contact zone.

3.4 *The land-based fur trade*

The HBC records from which I gleaned the bulk of my research document relations of conflict and cooperation towards mutual economic gain between Indigenous and European traders in the mid-nineteenth century. Fisher has observed that “when the trading partnership was established, the Indian and the fur trader shared certain interests, and the best evidence that both recognized them is the relative lack of hostility between the two groups.”²⁴⁴ In addition to a few well-documented events – such as the plunder and ransom of the American gold-seeking ship the *Susan Sturgis* in 1852, in which Albert Edward Edenshaw was allegedly involved – the fur trade

²⁴³ Marianne Nicholson, “Starting from the Beginning,” in *Native Art of the Northwest Coast*, 520-521.

²⁴⁴ Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 35.

records from Fort Simpson document a range of interactions, operating to varying degrees of intensity between HBC and Indigenous traders.²⁴⁵ The following extracts, gleaned from Fort Simpson logbooks from the 1830s to the 1860s are just a few examples of the HBC's documentation of the goods brought by Haidas from Skidegate, Masset and Alaska, and the tensions at the Fort.

4th May [1835] ...20 large canoes arrived from Skittegatts [Skidegate] with Potatoes, Sea and Land otter skins...²⁴⁶

14 [September 1837] The Massette [Masset] and Skiddegate Indians and part of the Chimsyans [Tsimshian] went off, We are glad to see them gone as we will now be able to send the people outside to attend to their work, it is a great retardment to our work being so long not able to sentence them out of doors when so many of these vagabond Massettes were about...²⁴⁷

13-14 [May 1853] 16 canoes of Kigarnies [Kaigani Haida]...arrived, which makes about 80 canoes of Haiders [sic] so called, that we have now and about 650 Indians that came in them, so we have just as much as we can do to trade, and look out for the fellows, we have small rows frequently thru the day with them. I do not think so many strangers were ever here at one time before... There cannot be any less than 1000 Indians now assembled here... The Kigarnies and Massetts have lots of property with them, from the plunder of the Susan Sturges [sic], they have gold coins, and dust, but we cannot get it from them as they ask for the full value of it. The Medicine chest, boxes, candles, glass, plates, cups and saucers, clothing, etc...²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵ On the incident of the *Susan Sturgis*, with particular reference to its relationship to Haida art and material heritage, see Bunn-Marcuse, "Eagles and Elephants," in *Charles Edenshaw*, 178; George MacDonald, *Chiefs of the Sea and Sky: Haida Heritage Sites of the Queen Charlotte Islands* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1989), 71; Wright, *Northern Haida Master Carvers*, 160-161.

²⁴⁶ Fort Simpson logbook, 4 May 1835. B.201/a/3, HBCA.

²⁴⁷ Fort Simpson logbook, 14 September 1837. B.201/a/3, HBCA.

²⁴⁸ Fort Simpson logbook, 14 May 1853. B.201/a/7, HBCA.

31 [May 1865] ...A number of Hydah canoes arrived from the south [Victoria].
No trade of any kind...²⁴⁹

Though their wealth had declined with the depletion of the sea otter by the 1830s the Haidas, throughout the decades of the land-based fur trade, exercised autonomy and agency in economic, political and cultural arenas. And while the Queen Charlotte Islands would be annexed to the colony of Vancouver Island by Governor James Douglas in 1852 following the Haidas' discovery of gold on the archipelago's west coast, the islands were free from colonial political authority until British Columbia entered confederation in 1871.²⁵⁰ This discussion is an impression of the land-based fur trade from the 1820s to the 1860s, decades that preceded the widespread settlement and colonization of southern British Columbia, and the time during which the argillite carvings now in Scottish museum collections were created and circulated. Like Fisher and others, I argue that Indigenous-European relations during the early to middle decades of the nineteenth century can be characterized by mutual goals of amassing wealth and controlling resources.²⁵¹ In addition to the potatoes Haidas cultivated for sale at Fort Simpson, argillite carvings were a means to regain "some of the wealth

²⁴⁹ Fort Simpson logbook, 31 May 1865. B.201/a/9, HBCA.

²⁵⁰ Mary Lee Stearns, *Haida Culture in Custody: the Masset Band* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press; Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1981), 33.

²⁵¹ See also Glass, *Objects of Exchange*, 14-15.

they lost by the passing of the [maritime] fur trade from their shores” in the early 1800s.²⁵² By promoting objects as historical documents, this chapter builds upon recent material culture-based contributions to the study of intercultural relations between Northwest Coast Indigenous peoples and Europeans.²⁵³ Though a “complete picture” of these encounters can never be formed, using objects and texts as overlapping historical sources reveals the complexities of these relations from different points of view and experience.

3.5 The Hudson’s Bay Company: a brief history of argillite collecting on the Northwest Coast

Historian Douglas Cole described the HBC, which reached the Northwest Coast in the first decades of the nineteenth century, as having collected little, and moreover that little of what was collected can be traced. HBC Governor George Simpson made a small collection, and Hudson’s Bay House, the Company’s headquarters in London, “had a museum of Indian objects.”²⁵⁴ Another well-known early collector of argillite

²⁵² Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 44.

²⁵³ See Glass et al., *Objects of Exchange* (2011); Jacknis, “From Explorers to Ethnographers,” in *Native Art of the Northwest Coast* (2013); Malloy, *Souvenirs of the Fur Trade* (2000).

²⁵⁴ Cole, *Captured Heritage*, 6.

was the HBC surgeon and factor Dr William Fraser Tolmie of Inverness.²⁵⁵ Tolmie collected extensively, and according to his published correspondence of 1838, he sent a collection of natural and ethnographic “Specimens for [the] Inverness Museum,” which among examples of local flora and fauna, included ethnographic works from cultures inhabiting the length of the Northwest Coast then in contact with HBC posts. Tolmie’s Inverness collection included a bowl or dish (“Basin carried by the Haidah Indians inhabiting Queen Charlotte’s island”), Haida pipes (Tolmie did not identify the pipes’ material), and a Haida dagger, “ornamented with pieces of shell brought from California.”²⁵⁶ Tolmie’s correspondence shows he forwarded his collection from Fort Vancouver via the HBC ship *Columbia*, which left the fort in October 1838 and arrived in London seven months later.²⁵⁷ “Having long felt desirous to present the Museum of my native town with specimens...enumerated [above]” Tolmie wrote the

²⁵⁵ See Cole, *Captured Heritage* (1985); Drew and Wilson, *Argillite, Art of the Haida* (North Vancouver: Hancock House, 1980); Macnair and Hoover, *The Magic Leaves* (1984); Wright, *Northern Haida Master Carvers* (2000).

²⁵⁶ Letter from Tolmie to A.C. Henderson, 24 June [1838?]. William Fraser Tolmie, *The Journals of William Fraser Tolmie: physician and fur trader*, ed. Howard T. Mitchell (Vancouver: Mitchell Press, 1963) 327.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 328; Bruce McIntyre Watson, *Lives Lived West of the Divide: A Biographical Dictionary of the Fur Traders Working West of the Rockies, 1793-1858* (Kelowna: University of British Columbia, 2010), 1105-1106.

museum, “I will feel much obliged by your informing me by letter whether they have reached in safety...”²⁵⁸

Tolmie’s Inverness collection is now unaccounted for. Jeanette Pearson, Conservation Officer at the Inverness Museum and Art Gallery, informed me that the museum “does not have any argillite or any other First Nations material” in their collections.²⁵⁹ Tolmie’s correspondence shows he collected objects for several people, including HBC governor George Simpson, to whom he sent, circa 1838, “a couple” of Chinook skulls along with a collection of shells.²⁶⁰ In 1839, Tolmie sent “vocabularies of Indian Languages” (including Haida), as well as three (unidentified) skulls, pipes and dishes to Dr John Scouler, a Scottish naturalist whom Tolmie knew from his student years at the University of Glasgow’s medical school (1829-1831).²⁶¹ Cole argues that the collection that Tolmie sent to Scouler “probably became part of Scouler’s 1870s gift to Paris’s Musée du Trocadéro.”²⁶² Through his position in fur

²⁵⁸ Tolmie, *Journals*, 328.

²⁵⁹ Jeanette Pearson. Email to Kaitlin McCormick, December 2012. Ms. Pearson also noted that “during the 1980s the majority of our world history material was transferred to the National Museums Scotland as part of rationalisation and to comply with our collecting policy....Nairn Museum...used to have collections related to either native American (or Canadian) peoples.” The connections between Scotland’s early ethnographic collectors, and the routes of their collections warrant further research.

²⁶⁰ Tolmie, *Journals*, 329.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 333.

²⁶² Cole, *Captured Heritage*, 6. The Musée du Trocadéro is now the Musée de l’Homme. In the late twentieth century, the Musée de l’Homme transferred its ethnology collections in the Musée du quai

trade society and his own ethnographic proclivities, Tolmie was an important middleman for the circulation of objects and knowledge of Northwest Coast Indigenous peoples.

Other important HBC-related collections include a group of argillite pipes in the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History. These argillite pipes, along with a collection of masks and wooden ship pipes, were given to the American naval lieutenant Charles Wilkes in October 1841 by the master of the HBC ship *Columbia*, which had returned to the Columbia River from a trip to the northern coast.²⁶³ According to John McLoughlin, then chief factor at Fort Vancouver, "Captain Wilkes and his people had as little dealings with the Indians as they possibly could...I am not aware that any one attached to the Expedition traded a Single Skin from the Indians and even Salmon when the parties were in reach of the Establishment they preferred to get from us than to have any dealings with the natives."²⁶⁴ In addition to the collecting activities of its individual agents such as Tolmie, the HBC also acted as

Branly, which is where Scouler's collection now sits. See also Wright, *Northern Haida Master Carvers*, 157.

²⁶³ Wright, *Haida Argillite Pipes* (1980), 48; Wright, *Northern Haida Master Carvers*, 156. The Wilkes Expedition (a.k.a. the United States Exploring Expedition) was a surveying and exploring expedition that toured the Pacific Coast from 1838-1842.

²⁶⁴ Letter, John McLoughlin to the [HBC] Governor, 17 September 1841, quoted in E.E. Rich, *The Publications of the Champlain Society: McLoughlin's Fort Vancouver Letters, 1839-44* (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1941), 127.

a middle agent more generally in the circulation of “curiosities” and other goods for external parties in the early 1840s.²⁶⁵ It seems, as I note below, that the ability of some Company agents to converse in Native and trade languages, was an important factor in the circulation of these types of objects.

While it is known that at least a few agents of the HBC collected early argillite and other ethnographic works from the Northwest Coast in the 1830s and 40s, as I pointed out in the introduction to this thesis, scholars generally assert that the argillite carving tradition began sometime before 1820. Thereafter, “rather than being made only as functional tobacco pipes used in funeral feasts and house raisings, these objects began to be made for sale to fur traders on their sailing ships and to depict exotic motifs to appeal to this new market.”²⁶⁶ Though the first textual documentation of Haidas’ carving of argillite pipes occurred in 1829 with the eyewitness account of missionary Jonathan Green at Skidegate,²⁶⁷ contemporary Haida perspectives such as Captain Gold’s hold that the argillite deposit “was in [Haidas’] memories for a long

²⁶⁵ See Wright, “Haida Argillite Ship Pipes” (1979).

²⁶⁶ Wright, *Northern Haida Master Carvers*, 159. See also Thomas Vaughan and Bill Holm, *Soft Gold: The Fur Trade and Cultural Exchange on the Northwest Coast of North America* (Portland: Oregon Historical Press, 1982), 134.

²⁶⁷ Macnair and Hoover note that “Jonathan S. Green’s 1929 observation of argillite pipes at Hlragilda ‘Ilnagaay [Skidegate] (Green 1915:86) remains the earliest and best date presently known.” *The Magic Leaves* (2002), 149.

time before this so-called 1830 beginning point.”²⁶⁸ Though the HBC became a distributor of argillite carving beginning around the late 1830s, as Malloy has shown, the Haidas’ first customers for these things were the American mariners who visited the northern coast in the 1820s.²⁶⁹ These works were traded before the HBC established itself in the fur trade context on the Northwest Coast, and long before the Company would develop its trade monopoly there circa 1840. Still, as Wright has shown, during the years of the land-based fur trade “the Hudson’s Bay Company became the major collector and distributor of Haida argillite pipes,” the earliest argillite carving types to arrive in the world’s museums.²⁷⁰ Two such pipes, pictured in Chapter 4, form part of the Colin Robertson collection at PMAG (1978.468 and 1978.471).

In their analysis of the historiography of argillite carving, Macnair and Hoover dispute museum documentation dates for the acquisition of argillite prior to, and even during the 1830s.²⁷¹ If, as they suggest, museums did not begin to acquire argillite carvings until at least the 1830s, then the HBC with its coastal forts, ships and daily

²⁶⁸ Captain Gold. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Skidegate, 3 April 2014. See also Vaughan and Holm, *Soft Gold*, 134.

²⁶⁹ Malloy, *Souvenirs of the Fur Trade* (2000).

²⁷⁰ Wright, *Haida Argillite Pipes* (1977), 47.

²⁷¹ Macnair and Hoover, *The Magic Leaves* (2002), 149. Here, the authors review and critique the scholarly literature on argillite carving from the 1950s to the 1980s.

trade, comes into focus, as Wright noted, as a major player in the circulation of these works. Fort Simpson, which was established on the Nass River in 1831 and later removed to the Tsimshian Peninsula in 1834, is especially significant to this trade given its proximity to Haida Gwaii.

As scholars have shown, the lack of reliable museum documentation for early argillite collections makes them difficult to trace.²⁷² HBC records suggest that until the late nineteenth century, works of argillite were not circulated as official trade items, but rather as curiosities, and therefore references to argillite in Company records are scarce. Though research for this thesis was limited to a few weeks at the HBCA, further perusal of HBC fort and ship logbooks, correspondence and private records might yield more of what one HBCA archivist described as “throwaway” references to the circulation of curiosities in records documenting the early to mid-nineteenth century trade. Still, the geographical and historical position of the HBC on the Northwest Coast (which allowed its own personnel to act as agents in the circulation of such objects), the fact that several of the Scottish museum collections were acquired by or through employees of the Company, and finally the robustness of the HBC archives as daily records of trade and fur trade life, qualifies the Company’s archives

²⁷² Wright, *Haida Argillite Pipes* (1977) 39; Macnair and Hoover, *The Magic Leaves* (2002), 149; Cole, *Captured Heritage*, 6; Malloy, *Souvenirs of the Fur Trade*, xv.

as an important source of information on the origins of these Scottish argillite collections.

3.6 *The Northwest Coast fur trade during the 1820s*

The HBC's monopoly of the western/British agency of the Northwest Coast fur trade followed years of political maneuvering and should be understood in the context of global political and economic events. As Wright has pointed out in her history of northern Haida master carvers, Haidas had had at least twenty-five years of interaction with Russian, Spanish and British vessels prior to the HBC's establishment on the coast.²⁷³ Indeed for Haidas, their interactions with the HBC represents a relatively short period in a much longer history of Indigenous trade in the Pacific region. From "1789 on, the American traders gradually took over the trade, until 'by about 1800 it had become the practical monopoly of the city of Boston.'"²⁷⁴ Trade monopolies of British companies (i.e. the South Sea Company and the East India Company) precluded private British enterprise from profiting from the Pacific sea otter trade, whereas Americans were not subject to British restrictions. Until 1846, the Oregon country was open for trade between British and American interests under the terms of

²⁷³ Wright, *Northern Haida Master Carvers* (2001).

²⁷⁴ Wright, *Haida Argillite Pipes* (1977), 40, quoting Howay, 1934, 112. See also Wright, *Northern Haida Master Carvers*, for a comprehensive analysis of Haida-European trade encounters from 1774 onward.

the 1818 Anglo-American Convention.²⁷⁵ This American agency, along with European preoccupation with wars in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, led to the American domination of the sea otter trade in the early nineteenth century.²⁷⁶ However, with the decline (but not obliteration) of the sea otter by the 1830s, Americans and Haidas who were central players in this trade suffered economically. Some of the earliest documented collections of argillite carving, brought back as souvenirs of the trade, can be found in museums on America's Eastern seaboard.²⁷⁷

Land-based forts did exist during the maritime fur trade, such as that established by the Russian American Company at Sitka in 1799. In 1811, the German-American John Jacob Astor's Pacific Fur Company (PFC) erected Fort Astoria at the mouth of the Columbia River. The PFC was important because in addition to bridging the maritime and land-based fur trades, it was the first company on the Northwest Coast to establish inland posts.²⁷⁸ The other major player in this early nineteenth century trade was the HBC's Montréal rival the Northwest Company, which had by the early nineteenth century established several posts west of the Rocky Mountains, later to be taken over by the HBC following

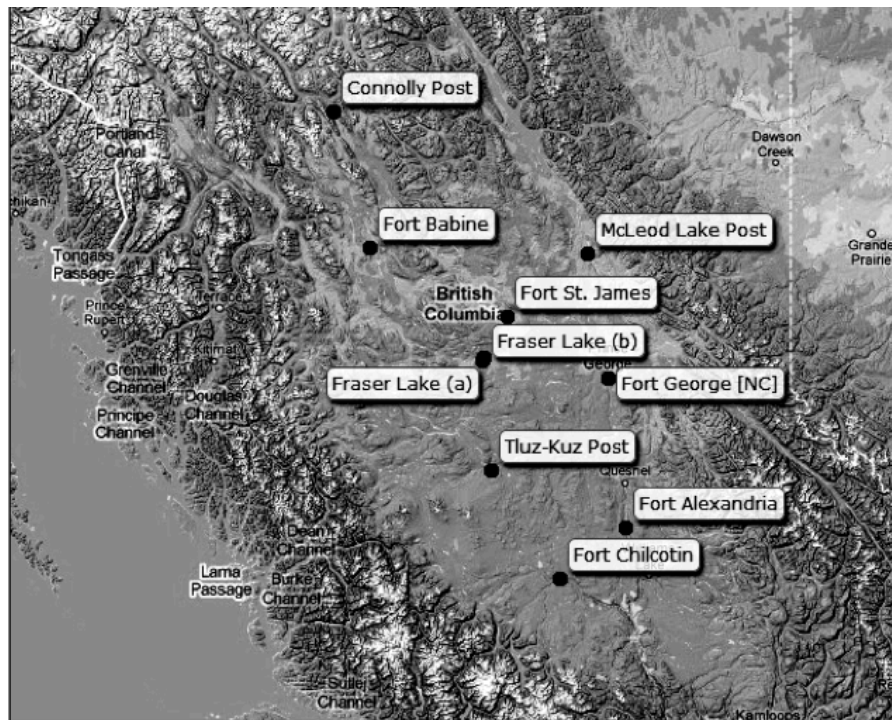
²⁷⁵ Somerset Mackie, *Trading Beyond the Mountains: The British Fur Trade on the Pacific, 1793 – 1843* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997) 36.

²⁷⁶ Wright, *Haida Argillite Pipes* (1977), 40.

²⁷⁷ See Malloy, *Souvenirs of the Fur Trade* (2001).

²⁷⁸ McIntyre Watson, *Lives Lived*, 26.

the merger of the two companies in 1821. The NWC's first permanent fur trading post was established at McLeod Lake in the New Caledonia district in 1805, and in the following year Simon Fraser established both Fort St James at the southern end of Stuart Lake and a post on Fraser Lake. In 1807 Fort George was built at the Fraser and Nechako rivers, and "these forts were to be the major centres of the fur trade in the area named New Caledonia"²⁷⁹ (see Map 4).



Map 4. New Caledonia Posts

From: McIntyre Watson, *Lives Lived West of the Divide: A Biographical Dictionary of the Fur Traders Working West of the Rockies, 1793-1858* (Kelowna: University of British Columbia, 2010), 996, Image 77.

²⁷⁹ Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 25.

The War of 1812 between the US and Britain/Canada led to the sale of the PFC's Fort Astoria (which had been used as a depot for the collection and trade of inland furs) to the Northwest Company, which renamed it Fort George. With the merger of the NWC and the HBC in 1821, the HBC would use Fort George as a main fur trade depot until 1824-25 when the Company's headquarters were relocated upriver to Fort Vancouver.²⁸⁰ Although the NWC had control of the Pacific slope, its regional fur resources would not be systematically exploited until after its amalgamation with the HBC in 1821.²⁸¹ George Simpson's arrival in 1824 to "look at the Columbia enterprise" marked the beginning of the HBC's efforts to enter into competition on the coast.²⁸²

Having planned the HBC's coastal enterprise at Fort George (Columbia River) over the winter of 1825-26, governor George Simpson presented his vision to the London committee later that year and by 1827 Fort Langley was established on the lower Fraser River. From there, coastal forts built in the early 1830s included Fort Simpson (1831), "the company's most important coastal station," and Fort

²⁸⁰ Joshua Binus, "Fort Astoria, 1813," *The Oregon History Project*, © Oregon Historical Society (2003) accessed 11 December 2013, http://www.ohs.org/education/oregonhistory/historical_records/dspDocument.cfm?doc_ID=1BB54FF5-E32A-ADF7-9FC4C75B10C2B48D

²⁸¹ Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 25.

²⁸² Ibid.

McLoughlin on the central coast (1833).²⁸³ Through the 1840s, the establishment of a few more posts completed “a chain of forts up the coast as far north as latitude 54-40’, the boundary between British and Russian America” (see Map 5).²⁸⁴



Map 5. Coastal Posts

From: McIntyre Watson, *Lives Lived West of the Divide: A Biographical Dictionary of the Fur Traders Working West of the Rockies, 1793-1858* (Kelowna: University of British Columbia, 2010), 1003, Image 85.

Ships that were employed in establishing the Company’s coastal presence included the schooner *Cadboro* (1827), which helped to establish Forts Langley and

²⁸³ Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 26.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

Simpson, and the brig *Lama*, used to build Fort McLoughlin. The HBC's famous side-paddlewheel steamship *Beaver* worked as a supplier/trader from 1836, and as I discuss throughout this thesis, was the subject of the argillite portrait now at the University of Aberdeen Museum. Historian Richard Somerset Mackie summarizes the HBC's enterprise in the 1820s.

[The] company had sent the [ship] *William and Ann* on a reconnaissance of the North West Coast, dispatched an expedition to the Fraser River in 1824, initiated a new provision base at Fort Vancouver in 1825, established Fort Langley in 1827, and sent the *Cadboro* to trade on the southern edges of the North West Coast.²⁸⁵

Still, by 1829 the coastal trade remained under American control. Led by Governor Simpson from the mid to late 1820s, the HBC strategized to undermine the last American holds on the coast by building coastal posts such as Fort Simpson and by arranging with the Russian American Company to act as their suppliers/outfitters, a role previously held by private American ships. But not until the early 1840s would the HBC eliminate American competition from the fur trade in the Columbia district.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁵ Somerset Mackie, *Trading Beyond the Mountains*, 126.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 123, 127, 183.

3.6.1 *Roles of objects in trade relations and the voyage of the William and Ann*

Material resources were the things central to the fur trade relationship. As naval historian Barry M. Gough has pointed out, objects also played an important role in British attempts to facilitate friendly trade relations with Indigenous peoples as early as the late eighteenth century. Before Cook departed for his first voyage to the Pacific, the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty instructed him to “endeavour by all proper means to cultivate a friendship with the Natives, presenting them with such trifles as may be acceptable to them, exchanging with them for Provisions...showing them every kind of Civility and regard.”²⁸⁷ Before departing for the Northwest Coast on his third voyage, the Lords advised Cook: “distribute gifts which would remain as ‘traces and testimonies of you having been there.’”²⁸⁸ The HBC took a similar approach fifty years later when it entered the coastal land-based fur trade by collecting objects from Indigenous peoples as evidence of the kinds of things they used. The Company also

²⁸⁷ Admiralty Papers, Adm.2/1332, pp. 160 ff.; Admiralty Papers, Adm. 2/1332, pp. 284-96. Public Record Office, London. Quoted in Barry M. Gough, *Gunboat Frontier: British Maritime Authority and Northwest Coast Indians, 1846-1890* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984), 10. According to J.C.H. King, after the discovery of the lucrative sea otter pelts, Cook was “told to make a collection of ethnographical specimens and to enquire about native customs. This interest was derived from a desire to exploit the Northwest Coast commercially.” King, *Artificial Curiosities*, 11.

²⁸⁸ Admiralty Papers, Adm.2/1332, pp. 160 ff.; Admiralty Papers, Adm. 2/1332, pp. 284-96. Public Record Office, London. Quoted in Gough, *Gunboat Frontier*, 10.

‘planted’ HBC goods in exchange to stimulate interest in its products on the Northwest Coast.

As the “first vessel of the Hudson’s Bay Company to compete with the Boston ships,” the 1825 voyage of the *William and Ann* marked initial trade interactions between the HBC and Haidas in Haidas’ own waters.²⁸⁹ Aboard this ship was botanist David Douglas, naturalist/botanist Dr John Scouler, and clerk Alexander McKenzie of Inverness, whose task was to report on trade prospects and harbours between the Columbia River and Portland Canal, a major inlet on the northern B.C. coast.²⁹⁰ Scouler published his experiences of this voyage and his knowledge of Indigenous peoples of that region in multiple sources.²⁹¹ Speculation that Scouler’s argillite collection may have been acquired from Haidas when the ship was in the vicinity of Skidegate cannot be confirmed by any of his own accounts.²⁹² Accounts of this voyage

²⁸⁹ Wright, *Haida Argillite Pipes* (1979), 45.

²⁹⁰ McIntyre Watson, *Lives Lived*, 660.

²⁹¹ See John Scouler, *Account of a Voyage to Madeira, Brazil, Juan Fernandez, and the Gallapagos [sic] Islands, Performed in 1824 and 1825, with a View of Examining Their Natural History, & C* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood; London: T. Cadell, 1826); John Scouler, “Observations on the Indigenous Tribes of the N.W. Coast of America,” *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 11 (1841), 215-251; John Scouler, “On the Indian Tribes Inhabiting the North-West Coast of America,” *Journal of the Ethnological Society of London* (1848-1856), I (1848), 228-252; John Scouler, “Dr. John Scouler’s Journal of a Voyage to N.W. America. [1824-’25-’26] II. Leaving the Galapagos Islands for the North Pacific Coast,” *The Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society*, 6, (2) (June 1905), 159-205.

²⁹² Wright, *Haida Argillite Pipes* (1977), 47.

suggest that the *William and Ann* though anchored off the coast to Skidegate, sent no crew members or passengers to the village itself.²⁹³

Governor Simpson's comments indicate that Skidegate went unexplored. In his view, the voyage resulted in inadequate contact between the ship's crew and Northwest Coast people in the latter's villages. Furthermore, though references to argillite pipes are absent from Scouler's accounts of his 1825 voyage on the *William and Ann*, in *Account of a Voyage* (1826), Scouler notes that, when visited by a canoe of Skedans people on the 24th June, "every article they had with them indicated a high degree of ingenuity, and the number and distinctness of the figures carved on their clay pipes was admired by everyone."²⁹⁴ Scouler's observation here is interesting not only because it is absent from Alexander McKenzie's account of the same encounter (discussed below), but given Scouler's scientific background and professional eye for natural materials, it seems unlikely that he would conflate clay and argillite, especially since he later described Haida pipes as being carved from a "soft argillaceous stone."²⁹⁵

²⁹³ See Scouler, "Account of a Voyage," 69.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 63.

²⁹⁵ Scouler, "Observations," 219.

Even more curious is that where Scouler's account of 24 June notes the arrival of only one canoe from Skedans, McKenzie's journal entry of the same day records this visit of the Skedans people, but also that "shortly after another [canoe] was observed with an equal number of stout fellows...and were not long on board when they informed us they came from Skittegets [Skidegate]." This group, McKenzie noted, "only brought a large Sea Otter of a very good quality...[and] wished much we should come to anchor as they said they had a number of Skins but Capt. Hanwell [did] not at all seem disposed that way."²⁹⁶ Is it possible that while McKenzie was engaged in trade (his primary task on this journey), Scouler was looking at the Haidas' carved objects?²⁹⁷ Though Wright has shown that Haidas carved pipes of argillite to replace the clay pipes brought by Europeans, she also found the first eyewitness account of argillite pipes through the journal of missionary Jonathan Green who visited Skidegate in 1829.²⁹⁸ It appears from McKenzie's journal that no argillite was brought aboard the *William and Ann*.

²⁹⁶ Alexander McKenzie, "Journal of Alexander McKenzie on board the Brig William and Ann 1825," 24 June 1825, B.233/a/1, HBCA.

²⁹⁷ MacLachlan states that, "McLoughlin sent Alexander McKenzie to trade with the Natives." *The Fort Langley Journals*, 10.

²⁹⁸ Wright, *Haida Argillite Pipes* (1977), 13; Green, *Journal of a Tour*, 86; Macnair and Hoover, *The Magic Leaves* (1984), 204.

As noted earlier, scholars have suggested that it was probably from his colleague, the HBC official W.F. Tolmie, that Scouler acquired the argillite “pipe,” “assiette,” and “boîte à bijoux” now in the collections of the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris.²⁹⁹ Scouler clearly credits Tolmie as the source behind Scouler’s 1841 descriptions of the work of “the Queen Charlotte Islanders” in this passage:

They construct drinking vessels,³⁰⁰ tobacco-pipes, &c. from a soft argillaceous stone, and these articles are remarkable for the symmetry of their form, and the exceedingly elaborate and intricate figures which are carved upon them. With respect to carving and a faculty for imitation, the Queen Charlotte Islanders are equal to the most ingenious of the Polynesian Tribes... This account of the Haidah tribes has been furnished by Mr. Tolmie.³⁰¹

By the time Scouler’s *Observations* was published in 1841, Tolmie had lived and worked alongside Northwest Coast peoples for eight years, so it is not surprising that Scouler turned to Tolmie as an informed contact. Secondly, several attempts by Skidegate Haidas to convince the *William and Ann*’s captain Henry Hanwell to anchor near Skidegate were refused, so that the ship’s crew only exchanged objects with Haida traders on deck.

²⁹⁹ The Museum numbers for these objects are, respectively, 71.1879.5.4, 71.1879.5.5 and 71.1879.5.3.

³⁰⁰ Macnair and Hoover state that the earliest documented date for the “Western tableware” argillite type is 1839. It is therefore likely that Scouler acquired the account furnished by Tolmie sometime between the late 1830s and 1841. Macnair and Hoover, *The Magic Leaves* (2002), 21.

³⁰¹ Scouler, “Observations,” 219; Macnair and Hoover, *The Magic Leaves* (1984), 34, 149.

The fascinating and unpublished account of this voyage left by McKenzie, the Scottish clerk whom John McLoughlin sent to trade with northern Northwest Coast people, is available at the HBCA. McKenzie's detailed journal records several trade encounters with Haidas off the coast of Cumsheewa and Skidegate, as well as with Nisga'a people around the mouth of the Nass River. Sent to replace McLoughlin, chief trader of the HBC's new coastal headquarters at Fort Vancouver at the mouth of the Columbia River (est. 1824), McKenzie was chosen in part for his knowledge of the Chinook language. As I discuss below, even partial Native language skills of European intermediaries allowed them to act as agents in the circulation of curiosities at sites of trade and exchange. According to McLoughlin's report:

I therefore sent Alexander McKenzie, this Gentleman speaks the Chinook language and I consider is fully adequate to do all that was to be done. There was with Mr McKenzie a Chinook who speaks the Nootka [Nuu-chah-nulth] Tongue and by this means our people were able to hold Intercourse with People of that Nation...in dealing with Indians [Captain Hanwell] ought to allow Mr McKenzie to act as he thought proper as from his knowledge of the Indian and the Nature of the Trade he was better able to deal with them than the captain was to direct.³⁰²

The Chinook language and, later, the Chinook Jargon (a trade pidgin), were important for facilitating exchange on the Northwest Coast. However, McKenzie's observations

³⁰² John McLoughlin to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 6 October 1825. Quoted in E.E. Rich, *The Publications of the Champlain Society: McLoughlin's Fort Vancouver Letters, 1825-38* (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1941), 2.

on the difficulty of communication between the Haidas of Cumshewa and the ship's Chinook interpreter, as well as the "curious" way in which the Chinook man was observed by the Haida group, suggests that Chinook was not then in use on the northern coast. Furthermore, the Haidas' use of "[a] few" English words alludes to American presence in that region. Of the Haidas, McKenzie wrote:

Their language seems to be pretty difficult, several of their words appearing to proceed from the bottom of the throat and spoke in so loud and fast a manner as to lead to the supposition something hostile was premeditated. Our Cheenook [sic] Interpreter made use of the different languages he was master to no purpose which was the more to be regretted as both parties seemed much inclined to enter into conversation. Several attempts being made to little purpose. The Chinook was regarded with no small curiosity and his flat head which was examined all over was the first of the kind we think they had ever seen before.³⁰³

Though conversation was limited, mutual curiosity of the other was clearly communicated by all parties involved in this shipboard encounter. More broadly, McKenzie's journal reflects a sense of discovery and novelty, indicating that the northern Northwest Coast of the first quarter of the nineteenth century was still a relatively unexplored region from the European point of view.

On the ship's outward journey, having sailed north from Cape St. James, the southern-most point of Haida Gwaii between Kunghit and Kerouard islands, the *William and Ann* as noted was approached by canoes from Skedans and Skidegate on

³⁰³ McKenzie, "Journal," 23 June 1825.

24 June 1825. The Skidegate traders brought one apparently freshly killed and prepared sea otter skin, though their “exorbitant” demands for it – “nothing short of 10 Blankets 2 ½ points, or two muskets, or 8 Yrds Stroud, that being if we may believe them the Common price given by the American Vessels present on the Coast” – proved too expensive for the HBC traders. In his journal, McKenzie described these Haida traders’ projectiles and noted their use of a “Fowling Piece.” Though the *William and Ann* did not acquire any furs on that day, the Haida and HBC traders exchanged guns, for which McKenzie noted his “double motive”:

We however as one of [the Haida traders] had taken a fancy to our New Guns, exchanged one for a Fowling Piece, had a double motive for doing this, first that ours not being common among them the natives of this quarter might become in vogue, secondly that in the event of the Honble [sic] Company intending to extend their trade on any future occasion this far the present might answer as a sample of the gun required.³⁰⁴

Foreseeing trade on the northern Northwest Coast, McKenzie reckoned the exchange was an opportunity to stimulate local interest in HBC guns, as well as to return to Fort Vancouver with an example of the kind of gun already in use among the Haidas.

On their second day of trade off the coast of Graham Island, 25 June 1825, a canoe of Haidas approached from Skidegate. Among them was a man who “called himself by the name of Tom and appeared the most sensible, Communica[tive] Indian

³⁰⁴ McKenzie, “Journal,” 24 June 1825.

we had hitherto met with, [spoke] more English than we expected and evidently appears to be brought up in the Yankees School.” Though they did not bring any furs, Tom “mentioned [that] there was no less than 200 Sea Otters at Skittigets and did everything in [his] power to prevail on Capt. Hanwell to make a short stay there if it was only for one day, all to no purpose.” McKenzie noted that Tom was clearly familiar with the harbors of Haida Gwaii and the surrounding area, “laying down their different situations with a precision in English so plain as to actually astonish us.”³⁰⁵ After informing the crew of several American vessels that were, or had recently visited the Haidas from Boston and New York, two more canoes arrived from Skidegate and “corroborated Tom’s Statement regarding the 200 Sea Otters at the Village and did everything in their power to persuade the Capt[ain] to make a short stay among them with no better success than those before. Seeing which they left the vessel about noon with displeasure evidently depicted in their countenances.”³⁰⁶

Given unsuccessful attempts the previous day to convince the captain to anchor near Skidegate, it is likely that the Skidegate traders were sent to make inroads with the captain and crew of the *William and Ann* using Tom’s good English. On the second day of exchange, the crew traded “a few curiosities, chiefly Bows, Arrows with

³⁰⁵ McKenzie, “Journal,” 25 June 1825.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

a Hat or two of their own manufacture. The latter of which articles are superior to any thing of the kind we have seen at the Columbia.” Describing the Haida traders’ clothing, McKenzie noted that the man who brought the sea otter the previous day “wore a Blue cloth stroud, waistcoat and trousers of the same [material],” though the others were dressed more modestly, wearing “threadbare” 3 ½ and 4 Point Plain Blankets. As for firearms, “there appear[ed] to be no scarcity – American and Russian muskets with an occasional Fowling Piece are the principal [guns] which not an English Musket or NW [Company] Trading gun is to be seen among them.”³⁰⁷

McKenzie’s description of this trader’s clothing is similar to Hills’ account of the appearance of Chief Edenshaw, reproduced earlier in this chapter.³⁰⁸ McKenzie’s account shows that by the time Hills encountered Edenshaw, European clothing had long been used among presumably high-ranking Haida people. Indeed, among the goods traded to Indigenous traders by American ships in the late 1820s were blankets, “Duffles, Strouds, Cottons, Calicoes, Arms, Ammunition, rum, axes, Knives, buttons, fish hooks, Vermillion, [and] Tobacco.” Ready-made clothing including “Frock Coats, Waistcoats, Trowsers [sic] Shirts, Hats, Shoes, Handkerchiefs,” and a “variety of

³⁰⁷ McKenzie, “Journal,” 25 June 1825.

³⁰⁸ William Henry Hills, Journal MSS 1436/1, Mitchell Library, Sydney Australia (University of British Columbia Special Collections, Microfilm Reel 55028, I:2), 1853. Quoted in Gough, “New Light on Haida Chiefship,” 131-139, 137.

beads, Bracelets, brass Wire, looking Glasses, hiaquas [sic; shells] [and]...a small assortment of Glass and Crockery ware [that] would find a ready sale among these Indians.”³⁰⁹ That McKenzie reported upon, and judged, Haidas’ physical appearance (“savage”) and hygiene (at once “filthy” and “tidy”) demonstrates the ambivalent and contradictory tone towards Native others typical of his contemporaries.³¹⁰ The encounters he documented aboard the *William and Ann* admit his sense of surprise at the Haidas’ apparent modernity and sophistication regarding arms, language and dress.

As noted, McKenzie’s account makes no mention of the appearance of argillite during those shipboard exchanges, and it is therefore unlikely that the Haida traders brought any of this material onboard the *William and Ann*. Other observers’/sojourners’ keen observations of the striking and unusual appearance of argillite pipes documented in sources from the late 1820s to 1840s (“curious”;³¹¹ “remarkably clever and ingenious”³¹²) suggest that had argillite been presented, McKenzie probably would have commented on it, as he otherwise noticed the objects

³⁰⁹ Aemelius Simpson to John McLoughlin, 22 September 1828. B.223/c/1 fo. 13, HBCA. Quoted in Rich, *McLoughlin’s Fort Vancouver Letters*, 82.

³¹⁰ See Jacknis, “From Explorers to Ethnographers,” 52 and footnote 8 (90) for a discussion on explorers’ impressions of Northwest Coast First Nations’ material culture.

³¹¹ Green, *Journal of a Tour*, 86.

³¹² Simpson, *Narrative of a Journey*, 206.

common to most early shipboard encounters: canoes, clothing and weapons.³¹³ Jacknis has pointed out that, “most early commentators had high praise for [such] objects,” finding them to be “elegant, well designed, well executed, well proportioned, and neatly finished and carved.”³¹⁴ Recall McKenzie’s description of the Haida hats he acquired as curiosities, which he judged to be “superior to any thing of the kind we have seen at the Columbia.”³¹⁵

Though the encounter with the *William and Ann* was of course not the Haidas’ first experience with a British ship, it was likely their first meeting with the HBC in Haida waters, and likewise, it seemed to be McKenzie’s first encounter with Haida people. “First contact,” as Jacknis observes, “demanded a kind of basic definition and categorization for the arts as well as fundamental human traits.”³¹⁶ In most instances of first contact on the Northwest Coast, European observers compared Indigenous groups to the Nuuchah-nulth (“Nootka”), one of the first Northwest Coast peoples to have been contacted, and thereafter frequently visited, by Europeans. On the voyage of the *William and Ann*, McKenzie compared the Haidas’ appearance, arrows and hats to the Chinook peoples of the Columbia River from where the ship had departed the HBC’s

³¹³ Jacknis, “From Explorers to Ethnographers, 1770-1870,” *Native Art of the Northwest Coast*, 51.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

³¹⁵ McKenzie, “Journal,” 25 June 1825.

³¹⁶ Jacknis, “From Explorers to Ethnographers,” *Native Art of the Northwest Coast*, 53.

Fort Vancouver. Regarding the mainland trade encounters recorded in McKenzie's 1825 journal, other "curiosities" reportedly collected included,

From a group of Nisga'a [?] near Nass Inlet: "3 Large Halibut with a few ornamented wooden platters of their own manufacture, and [skins?] of the mountain sheep, the animal we understand frequent the mountains of this vicinity..."³¹⁷

Early nineteenth century descriptions of Northwest Coast objects as curious, ingenious or imitative reveal observers' interest in the unique aesthetic properties of Northwest Coast art, though their observations do not attempt any systematic stylistic analysis like that of later commentators such as Emmons and Boas. As Jacknis points out, "no [early] observer seems to have grasped the existence and integrity of the formline system."³¹⁸ This black calligraphic-like band defines the design elements of Northwest Coast art, as demonstrated by Franz Boas in *Primitive Art* (1927) and codified by Bill Holm in *Northwest Coast Native Art: an Analysis of Form* (1967). Still, the presence of Northwest Coast artifacts in the world's museum collections is evidence of the strong impressions these aesthetically striking objects left on their early nineteenth century collectors.

Near the Nass River on the 20th July 1825, the ship was "visited by about 20 Men and Women from Nass these only traded 1 Skin, berries and a few little

³¹⁷ McKenzie, "Journal," 11 July 1825.

³¹⁸ Jacknis, "From Explorers to Ethnographers," *Native Art of the Northwest Coast*, 52.

Curiosities.”³¹⁹ The “curiosities” collected on this voyage included the Haida hats, bows and arrows, the Nisga’a carved wooden food vessels, the specimens of mountain sheep horn and the group of unidentified “curiosities.” McLoughlin himself forwarded at least some of these objects to London, as he outlined in a letter to the Governor and Committee: “I have taken the liberty of sending a few Curiosities collected in the *William and Anns* trip along the Coast Among them you will find two Skins of what our people call the White Sheep of the Rocky Mountains, but it resembles more a Goat with Black Horns.”³²⁰ McLoughlin received the following response:

’The Curiosities collected during the Trip of the William and Ann along the Coast were very acceptable, and have made a considerable addition to a small Museum now forming here, and we have to desire that any specimens of natural history which may be collected should be sent home especially those which will not take up much room.’³²¹

I noted earlier the existence of this museum at Hudson’s Bay House, the Company’s London headquarters.³²² The HBCA holds what is possibly the catalogue of this early HBC museum, in the form of a small booklet titled “Catalogue of the

³¹⁹ McKenzie, “Journal,” 20 July 1825.

³²⁰ John McLoughlin to the Governor, Deputy Governor and Committee, 6 October 1825. Quoted in Rich, *McLoughlin’s Fort Vancouver Letters*, 2. Haidas traded with mainland groups such as the Nisga’a and Tsimshian for mountain goat horn, which they would steam and carve into spoons, some with plain handles, and others featuring handles carved with crest designs.

³²¹ Letter, HBC London Governor and Committee to John McLoughlin, 20 September 1826, B.223/c/1, HBCA, quoted in Jonathan R. Dean, “‘These Rascally Spackaloids’: The Rise of Gispaxlots Hegemony at Fort Simpson, 1831 – 40” *BC Studies* 101 (1994), 47.

³²² Cole, *Captured Heritage*, 6.

Museum.” The booklet is undated except for a water mark (“T. Edmonds 1826”), and contains hand-written lists of “Indian Curiosities” organized into the categories “Articles of Clothing Ornament etc.,” “Domestic Utensils, Tools, etc.,” “Implements for Fishing Hunting etc.,” “Warlike Implements etc.,” “Specimens of Indian Manufacture etc.,” and “Specimens of Carving etc.” Each category lists the objects within it, as well as in which case they were displayed.³²³ There is a total of 100 entries, with no entries in the “Natural History” section. Among Inuit objects and what appear to be pieces from the Plains and Eastern Woodlands peoples, there are approximately 30 entries of objects originating from Northwest Coast cultures: ten entries from the “Columbia,” thirteen entries identified as being of “Chinook” manufacture, two entries collected from “Queen Charlotte’s Island,” three from the “Straits of Juan de Fuca,” and two entries collected at “Nootka Sound.”³²⁴ In addition, several entries identify pieces probably of Northwest Coast manufacture (i.e. “Fish Hook for catching Halibut”) but that do not specify the region or culture of origin.

The pieces acquired from the Haidas were a carved wooden bowl and a labret; those from the Columbia River area consisted mostly of basketry and tools for fishing and food preparation. From the Straits of Juan de Fuca there was a wooden bowl and a

³²³ [No author], “Catalogue of the Museum,” [no date]. A.64/44, 1, HBCA.

³²⁴ Ibid. I use the term “entries” because in some cases there are multiple objects in a single catalogue entry.

dog's hair blanket, and from Nootka Sound a case of arrows and a bow. It is not surprising that a labret appears on this list; as Jacknis has observed, "without a doubt, the object that attracted the most notice [by Europeans] was the labret disk worn in the lower lip by the local women."³²⁵ Nor is it surprising that the majority of the Northwest Coast collections originate from the vicinity of the Columbia River. If, as the catalogue's watermark suggests it was prepared in or after 1826, these objects would probably have been acquired at or through Fort Vancouver, the Company's coastal headquarters and key trade centre from 1825.

Though McKenzie's journal documents and describes what are today considered fascinating intercultural exchanges, Governor Simpson, for whom economic and geographical intelligence was the objective, judged the voyage a failure. In August 1826, Simpson complained to the Committee in London that it was due to the overblown caution of Captain Hanwell (who refused most offers to anchor at Indigenous villages like Skidegate) that little information of importance was drawn:

It does not appear that any information of importance was collected on the Voyage made along the Coast to the northward of the Columbia by the *William and Ann* last year, indeed from the extraordinary and I may add unnecessary caution observed by Captain Hanwell it was impossible that much knowledge of either Harbours, Rivers...or country could have been granted as he had little or no communication with the Natives and rarely returned within a sufficient distance of the Land to run any risks – Prudence in moderation is commendable

³²⁵ Jacknis, "From Explorers to Ethnographers," 75.

but is an evil when carried to an extreme and we certainly think that Captain Hanwell's prudence on that Voyage amounted to pusillanimity.³²⁶

Though he was heavily criticized by both Simpson and McLoughlin, Hanwell's voyage did provide the HBC with some knowledge of the character of the coastal trade, for among McKenzie's other observations were the reports gleaned from Tom, who described and pointed out the American ships at work in the area, as well as their trading methods and relationships with the people of Skidegate, the place that McKenzie identified as the "general rendezvous of the American Vessels on the Coast."³²⁷

Though the voyage of the *William and Ann* is not directly related to the argillite collections now in Scottish museums, it is an important event in the story this thesis tells, because it marks the HBC's first encounter with Haidas in their own waters and as such introduces this trade relationship, which would develop more fully with the establishment of Fort Simpson on the Tsimshian Peninsula in 1834. Furthermore, demonstrating the positive relationships that sometimes developed between American and Indigenous traders, Malloy points out the example of a man

³²⁶ George Simpson, letter to Committee, from York Factory, 20th August 1826. D.4/89, HBCA. The HBC headquarters was the office of the Governor and Committee, run by the governor and a board of directors. Somerset Mackie, *Trading Beyond the Mountains*, 31.

³²⁷ Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company, 1670-1870: 1763-1870* (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1959), 612.

called Neacoot, identified by American mariners as the chief of Tongass who boarded the ship *Rob Roy* in 1822 as a “frequent passenger, a pilot, a translator, and a friend.” Several “high-ranking individuals from the Northwest Coast,” Malloy writes, “developed close, personal relationships with the officers of American ships, and the exchange of commodities, technology and gifts was continuous.”³²⁸ However, Malloy also points out that with increasing instances of violence between different parties, traders became more cautious and reluctant, as Captain Hanwell was in 1825, to spend time at Indigenous villages.³²⁹

The voyage of the *William and Ann* also illustrates the many types of objects and their roles in the fur trade. Things were exchanged to establish friendly relations, were brought back to Europe as evidence of the circulation and use of particular tools and technology in Native territories, and were collected for cultural comparison and as curios, souvenirs or evidence of experiences with Indigenous peoples. “In the intensifying contexts of commerce as well as conflict,” writes Glass, “we witness the role of objects – construed variously as art, artifact, commodity and souvenir – to mediate shifting intercultural relations of value and recognition, to express and enact

³²⁸ Mary Malloy, *Souvenirs of the Fur Trade*, 14-16.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

mutual mimicry as well as ambivalence, adaptation, and appropriation.”³³⁰ I return to the roles and statuses of objects in the conclusion to this chapter.

3.6.2 *Fort Langley and James Murray Yale*

In the summer of 1825, when returning to Fort Vancouver the *William and Ann* passed Cape Flattery, entering the Juan de Fuca Strait on its way to the mouth of the Fraser River. Along the way, the ship’s crew met several groups of Coast Salish who would later trade at Fort Langley, and McKenzie promised these groups that traders would return the following year.³³¹ The establishment of Fort Langley (in 1827) about thirty miles from the mouth of the Fraser River was part of Simpson’s plan for the Company’s coastal push. Built two years after the establishment of Fort Vancouver, Langley, while not overly significant in the bigger picture of fur trade history, left a “substantial” ethnological and local historical record through its journals.³³² As I show in more detail in Chapter 4, Fort Langley also plays an important role in the story about the Scottish argillite collections, since it was the place where James Murray Yale, a Canadian fur trader, organized Robertson’s collection, one of the oldest

³³⁰ Glass, *Objects of Exchange*, 5.

³³¹ MacLachlin, *The Fort Langley Journals, 1827-1830*, 10.

³³² *Ibid.*, 18.

collections of Northwest Coast material culture in Scotland. Yale was based at Langley from 1828-1859. According to Maclachlin,

The Fort Langley Journals reveal much about the decade of the 1820s. American traders were beginning to look for new areas to exploit; the 'Boston ships' were a formidable opposition mainly because of the difficulties that faced the British traders... This was a period of transition from the North West Company to Hudson's Bay Company control.³³³

As with McKenzie and the *William and Ann*, trade contacts had taken place between HBC and Indigenous people who would later trade at Langley along the fur trade routes between it and Fort Vancouver prior to Langley's establishment. While accounts in the Langley journals are full of detailed descriptions of trade and social relations between Company men and Coast Salish peoples, Fort Langley, as I noted, is significant in the history of Scottish HBC collecting as it is apparently the location from which a substantial part of the Colin Robertson collection originated (PMAG, 1833).

Langley was initially in the charge of Scottish traders George Barnston (1827-28), James McMillan (1828) and Archibald McDonald (1828-1830). Yale, of Lachine, Québec arrived at Langley in 1830 after thirteen years' experience with the Company. Circa 1834 Governor Simpson described Yale as:

³³³ Maclachlin, *The Fort Langley Journals, 1827-1830*, 13.

...a Canadian, about 36 years of age, 17 years in the Service. A Sharp active well conducted very little man full of fire with the courage of a Lion. Deficient in Education, but has a good deal of address & Management with Indians and notwithstanding his diminutive size is more feared and respected than some of our 6 feet men, but the want of Education precludes all hope of his Succeeding to an interest in the concern. Stationed at Frazers River.³³⁴

In 1833 when Yale was chief trader at Langley, two boxes of objects arrived at the Perth Literary and Antiquarian Society in Scotland, along with one collection list marked “Curiosities from Frasers River Gulf of Georgia North West Coast of America,” sent by Yale’s friend, colleague, and Perth native, Colin Robertson.³³⁵

Signed “Jas. M. Yale,” the list, hand-written on a piece of foolscap, is undated, however a watermark dates the paper to 1828. A second list, which accompanied a second box of objects, is unsigned, and is apparently written in a different hand.

Though I discuss the Yale/Robertson collection in fuller detail in Chapter 4, it is important to note that in addition to the mostly Coast Salish works comprising Robertson’s donation, both lists include two pipes; the second list includes a northern-style painted basketry hat and a Chilkat woven apron.³³⁶ As Colin Robertson never traveled west of the Rocky Mountains,³³⁷ it is possible that the northern Northwest

³³⁴ George Simpson, “Character Book,” Search File, “James Murray Yale,” from A.43/2, fo. 50d, HBCA.

³³⁵ James Murray Yale, “Curiosities” [no date specified], Archive 79, PMAG.

³³⁶ Idiens, *Catalogue of the Ethnographic Collection*, 45-49.

³³⁷ Shirlee Ann Smith, reply to research inquiry re: Colin Robertson. Colin Robertson Search File, HBCA.

Coast works were also acquired through Yale, though as I suggest in Chapter 4, given the provenance of items listed on the second collection list, it is equally possible that this second box of objects originated at Fort Vancouver on the Columbia River.

Yale apparently did not travel in the vicinity of Haida or Tlingit territory, though HBCA records show that he traveled extensively in the central interior of what would become the province of British Columbia from the early 1820s until he was posted at Langley in 1830. From 1821 to 1824 Yale was at Fort George on the upper Fraser River, after which he served at Forts Alexandria and St James, all in the HBC's New Caledonia district (see Map 4). He spent time recuperating from an illness in 1827-1828 at Fort Vancouver on the lower Columbia, where he could have crossed paths with McKenzie, who, prior to his 1828 death, was posted to Fort Vancouver (1826-1827) and Fort Langley (1827-1827).³³⁸

As a young trader the advice that Yale received from senior colleagues regarding trading with Indigenous peoples reveals contemporary attitudes about the management of exchange and the negotiation of relationships around objects. In 1822 for example, John Stuart (who descended the Fraser River with Simon Fraser in 1808)

³³⁸ According to McIntyre Watson, McKenzie was killed in January 1828 on his way back to Fort Vancouver from Fort Langley where he had carried dispatches from the HBC's headquarters on the Columbia. McKenzie was allegedly "killed for his clothes and arms by the Clallam Indians on the Hood Canal (Washington)." McIntyre Watson, *Lives Lived*, 660.

advised young Yale, then in charge of Fort George, about the nuances of power relations and exchange in the fur trade:

Experience will prove that when the person in charge do[es] not possess the good will and confidence of the Natives with whom he deals, not much provisions or any thing else can be expected, this is a truth well known to all conversant in Indian affairs, and it is equally true, that first impressions are lasting and not easily effaced, it will therefore be your interest – as it will be that of the Company’s, to endeavour to gain the good will of those with whom you deal, without which, though you may be feared, you can never be respected, and it is an erroneous idea, that giving property tends much towards gaining the confidence or esteem of any one, *it is the manner of doing a thing and not the thing itself that has an effect...*³³⁹

Stuart’s letter advises that it was not so much what was given, but how exchange was carried out, which mattered in the establishment and maintenance of relationships with Indigenous traders; the dynamics of exchange in the fur trade therefore hinged on the management of inter-personal relationships through the circulation of objects. Stuart’s insights show that the fur traders in some cases did have some understanding of the trade protocols of Indigenous groups. Still, the records from the Northwest Coast fur trade’s major posts illustrate the nuances of these relations, but only partially, and from a European point of view.

Shortly after Langley’s establishment, Yale himself was subject to an arranged marriage to the daughter of Nicamuns, a “Quaitlin” (Halkomelem Central Coast

³³⁹ Letter, John Stuart to James Murray Yale, 14 October 1822, my emphasis. New Caledonia Department correspondence. B.188/b/2, HBCA.

Salish) chief. Chief trader Archibald McDonald reported upon this “policy”

recommendation, and commented on the goods exchanged:

Thursday 13th [November 1828]. The Quaitline Chief Nicamuns and his brother Came in with 20 Skins Small & large – which they traded for Blankets – these, being the principal Indians of the neighbourhood & who at all exert themselves to Collect Beaver, we have thought it good Policy in Mr. Yale to form a Connection in that family – and accordingly he has now the Chief’s daughter after making them all liberal presents – In addition to which with the view of increasing their Stock of goods to barter with the distant Tribes we have given them two Blankets & a Couple of Traps for a fine large Canoe of theirs we Stand in need of to enter little rivers with in preference to a Boar or a Bark Canoe...³⁴⁰

As many scholars have shown, success in the fur trade depended on Europeans’ ability to mix with Indigenous people, linguistically and through marriage partnerships and political alliances (which often went hand in hand).³⁴¹ These relationships did not always last. Just over one month later Yale attempted to end this marriage, which McDonald said had “Cost So much goods.”³⁴² Among Central Coast Salish groups, intermarriage with both local and distant people was common, despite linguistic and

³⁴⁰ McDonald, Fort Langley journal, 13 November 1828, quoted in MacLachlan, *The Fort Langley Journals, 1827-30*, 85.

³⁴¹ Harris has shown that interracial partnerships provided the fur traders with allies in Native societies, and occurred when new forts were established. *The Resettlement of British Columbia*, 49. See also Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in Fur Trade Society, 1670 -1870* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980); Marsden and Galois, “The Tsimshian, the Hudson’s Bay Company, and the geopolitics of the Northwest Coast fur trade, 1787-1840,” *The Canadian Geographer* 39 (2) (1995):169-183.

³⁴² McDonald, Fort Langley journal, 20 December 1828, quoted in MacLachlan, *The Fort Langley Journals, 1827-30*, 90.

cultural differences. For them, “all these marriage ties involved ritual exchange and promoted trade.”³⁴³ In addition to his constant travels and attempt to establish kinship and trade ties Yale also attended local potlatches, the significance of which did not escape the notice of chief trader McDonald. In this extract, McDonald explains the motivations underlying the distribution of property, demonstrating his understanding of the calculating nature of gift giving.

Thursday 22 [January 1829]. Messrs. Annance & Yale with Six Men were at the Indian feast, and returned with 16 Beaver as their Share of the distributed property – I believe this is a Common practice with the principal Indians, and the real motive not so much from a professed Spirit of liberality & greatness as from avarice & gain, for tis well understood that every one who receives, acknowledges a debt of at least 20 per Cent above the actual value of what he got!³⁴⁴

³⁴³ Maclachlan, *The Fort Langley Journals*, 195. Anthropologist Wayne Suttles writes that, “a system of exchange was important in this region of varied resources and in a society with some degree of specialization. The ethnographic work suggests that most exchanges took place between kinsmen and affines within a social network that linked villages, tribes, and whole regions.” “External Relations,” in “Central Coast Salish,” in William C. Sturtevant (gen. ed.), *Northwest Coast: Handbook of North American Indians*, Vol. 7. Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1990, 456.

³⁴⁴ McDonald, Fort Langley journal, 22 January 1829, in Maclachlan, *The Fort Langley Journals, 1827-30*, 94. In his report on Central Coast Salish culture, Suttles distinguishes between feasts and potlatches, the latter of which specifically involved the giving of wealth. McDonald’s account describes the distribution of goods among guests, and the subsequent debts of the receivers. McDonald’s account however, which suggests that the potlatcher’s fame was not an object of the potlatch, contrasts with ethnographic data specific to Central Coast Salish forwarded by Suttles, who notes that “it appears that potlatchers did not expect that potlatch gifts would be returned with interest, nor even that they would all be returned. Potlatchers invested for fame, which might have its material rewards in secure relations with neighbouring villages and tribes and in good marriages for their children.” Suttles, “Feasts and Potlatches,” in “Central Coast Salish,” in Sturtevant (gen. ed.), 469.

As a trader and frequent traveler, Yale would have been familiar with Northwest Coast Indigenous cultures, and was therefore well positioned to collect objects. It is not surprising then, that in 1824 Colin Robertson (then at York Factory) wrote Yale (then in the New Caledonia District) asking, “if you pick up anything in the shape of curiosities, please collect them for me and I will pay all expenses.”³⁴⁵ Although this letter was written nearly a decade before the collection arrived at Perth, it shows that Robertson was interested to take advantage of Yale’s whereabouts to acquire objects towards a collection. While the HBC was establishing its presence on the Coast in the 1820s, employees such as Yale who traveled extensively could collect objects from local Indigenous people with whom they lived and worked. These collections indicate European/Canadian traders’ interest and curiosity in Indigenous cultures, their use of Indigenous technologies and their economic and social relationships with each other. Records also show how HBC agents negotiated what they understood to be the close relationship between the exchange of objects and the establishment and maintenance of social relations.

As the maritime fur trade waned, the HBC’s exploration of trade on the northern Northwest Coast with the *William and Ann* yielded examples of

³⁴⁵ Robertson to Yale, 26 July 1824, in J. Grant and H.B. Yale Kempster [no date]. “An Unsung Pioneer: The Life and Times of James Murray Yale,” Yale Family Fonds, MS-0182, Box 2, File 1, Item 3, British Columbia Provincial Archives.

contemporary Haida and Nisga'a technology – including objects of both Indigenous and Western make – as well as examples of their material culture. In her analysis of early Northwest Coast collections at American museums, Malloy has positioned works such as Haida argillite and masks as souvenirs of maritime trade: “American seafarers acquired Northwest Coast Indian artifacts to encapsulate their own experience rather than to illustrate the culture of the people with whom they traded.”³⁴⁶ It is possible that McKenzie's collecting was motivated by the strategic acquisition of information. Ascertaining the character of northern Native groups, and the kind of goods they desired, would have been valuable information for establishing the HBC's presence as a competitive leader in the coastal land-based trade.

3.7 *The Northwest Coast fur trade in the 1830s and 1840s*

In 1832, four years before the *Beaver* would arrive at Fort Vancouver, Governor Simpson wrote the HBC headquarters in London to promote the benefits of a steamship on the Northwest Coast:

The advantages which a Steam Vessel would possess over sailing craft in navigating the rivers inlets and Sounds, which are so numerous on that coast, and where all the trade is made, embolden us to request that Your Honours will be pleased to provide a Vessel of that description. We are aware that the first cost would be heavy, but we feel assured that she would, in a very short time, become the cheapest craft that could be used, and perform more effective service than any two Sailing Vessels which might be provided...A steam vessel would

³⁴⁶ Malloy, *Souvenirs of the Fur Trade*, 3.

afford us incalculable advantages over the Americans, as we could look into every Creek and cove while they were confined to a harbour by head winds and calms, we could visit our establishments at stated periods, in short a Steam Vessel would, in our opinion, bring the contest to a close very soon, by making us masters of the trade.³⁴⁷

Correctly predicting the advantages of steam power for the coastal trade, Simpson's famous steamer *Beaver* was the first of its kind in use on the Northwest Coast, arriving at Fort Vancouver from England in 1836. As a steamship, the *Beaver* allowed for all-weather shipping and the navigation of narrow coastal channels and inlets. The *Beaver* is now recognized to have revolutionized the maritime fur trade; Simpson, who traveled upon it on his "voyage round the world" (1841-1842), described the steamer as a technology that conveyed prestige to local peoples who were impressed by steam power. Since the *Beaver* "played a vital role in commercial trade," it also contributed towards "the expansion of Native wealth" by broadening trading opportunities for coastal communities.³⁴⁸

Underlying his enthusiasm for steam was Simpson's determination to eliminate American competition from the coastal fur trade. The inland fur trading district of New Caledonia was threatened by the high prices Americans paid on the coast for land

³⁴⁷ Simpson, "Extract from letter from Governor George Simpson to the Governor Deputy-Governor and Committee, Hudson's Bay Company, London, dated York Factory, 10 August 1832." SF *Beaver* Vertical Files, Accession # 1987-174, D.4/00, fos. 16d-17d, HBCA.

³⁴⁸ Williams, catalogue essay, in Glass, *Objects of Exchange*, 155.

furs that the HBC was paying lower prices for in the interior, so the close relationship between Carrier trappers and Coast Tsimshian traders resulted in the flow of furs from the interior to the coast.³⁴⁹ Simpson aimed to stop this bleeding of furs to the coast because “control of the North West Coast was...critical to the security of the Columbia Department as a whole and indirectly to British interests in western North America.”³⁵⁰ To cut off American competition, the Company would establish coastal posts in strategic locations, offer competitive prices on merchandise and supplies, and form connections with interior posts to regulate and standardize prices. Furthermore, Simpson’s comments allude to the Company’s role in furthering British colonial aspirations.

Built in 1831 at the mouth of the Nass River, Fort Simpson was the first of eight new coastal posts established following Fort Vancouver. In 1834, Fort Simpson relocated to Lax Kw’alaams on the Tsimshian Peninsula where it would become “the company’s most important coastal station” (see Map 5).³⁵¹ Though a newly significant location for the HBC, Lax Kw’alaams had been used long before the coming of Europeans as a temporary camp for itinerant Tsimshian traveling between Nass River eulachon fishing grounds and their winter dwellings in Metlakatla. By the late 1830s,

³⁴⁹ Somerset Mackie, *Trading Beyond the Mountains*, 129-133.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 125.

³⁵¹ Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 26.

“the Hudson’s Bay Company was firmly established within the geopolitical landscape of the Northwest Coast.”³⁵² The fort was built at a place that already had deep economic and geopolitical roots for local Tsimshian and other coastal Indigenous groups.

In 1833 Fort McLoughlin was built on the central coast (Map 5). With the decline of American competition by the early 1840s, Simpson decided McLoughlin was no longer necessary and it was closed in 1843. Fort Simpson, on the other hand, was “the most central point and principal establishment upon that Coast, [and was] considered the depot of the district.”³⁵³ Declaring Fort Simpson and the *Beaver* capable of facilitating most of the coastal trade, Simpson proposed closing down northern Forts Taku (1840-1843) and Stikine (1840-1849) (Map 5). The “establishment of Fort Simpson alone, with the Beaver Steamer, will answer every necessary and useful purpose, in watching and collecting the trade of the whole of that line of Coast, the transport of the supplies and returns to be accomplished in one trip of a sailing vessel from Fort Vancouver to Fort Simpson.” Simpson argued that the *Beaver* was a more convenient and efficient vessel to visit coastal Native villages to collect trade goods and supply them the six times per year it made these trips. Moreover, the steamship

³⁵² Marsden and Galois, “The Tsimshian,” 179.

³⁵³ Simpson (Fort Vancouver), Letter to Governor and Deputy Governor and Committee of the Hudson’s Bay Company, 25 November 1841. D.4/110, fo. 28, HBCA.

would bypass the problem of Indigenous “home guards.” These were the local groups that pursued power as middlemen in the Company’s dealings with other Indigenous trading groups, such as the Tsimshian at Fort Simpson, whose houses outside the Fort are pictured below in a painting by Freddie Alexcee.³⁵⁴



Figure 12. “Fort Simpson”

By Freddie Alexcee, c. 1900

Oil, graphite on canvas

National Gallery of Canada

42366

Image © National Gallery of Canada

With the closure of Forts McLoughlin, Taku and Stikine, Simpson’s report highlighted the importance of both the steamship and Fort Simpson to late 1830s and 1840s trade. Haidas began trading immediately at Fort Simpson, whose logbooks

³⁵⁴ Simpson (Fort Vancouver), Letter to Governor and Deputy Governor and Committee of the Hudson’s Bay Company, 25 November 1841. D.4/110, fos. 28-30, HBCA.

record the sale of Haida potatoes, whale oil, and some land and sea otter skins. The routine comings and goings of large trade groups of Haidas from Cumshewa, Masset, Skidegate and Kaigani are reported from the mid-1830s, continuing through the mid-1860s, where research for this thesis ends.

Reflecting the frequent contact and exchange between Haidas and the HBC during these decades, European imagery features prominently on argillite pipes and figures produced during this time. Macnair and Hoover point out that the earliest documented date for European-themed argillite ship carvings is 1830, and that the ship panel pipes, such as the *Beaver* carving at the UAM, were produced until at least 1872.³⁵⁵ Several of these western-themed works appear in the collections in Edinburgh and Aberdeen. As noted earlier in this chapter, the PMAG's Robertson collection features two ceremonial-type pipes that are chronologically and stylistically early, and accordingly, feature Haida motifs. The carvings in UAM's Mitchell collection, and those in the collections of Hector and Rae at the NMS, include several European-themed pieces, reflecting the sustained exchanges between Haidas and Europeans that took place at HBC forts from the 1830s to 60s.

³⁵⁵ Macnair and Hoover, *The Magic Leaves* (2002), 21.

Though Haidas began to visit the newly relocated Fort Simpson in 1834, historian Robert Galois has pointed out that the “Ft Simpson Journals include data on Haida movements and support an argument that Haida visits to the mainland [also] involved trading with Tsimshian and Nisga’a groups...they reflect a pattern of movements and trading activities that pre-date the establishment of the Fort.”³⁵⁶ Again, it is important to remember, as artist Jaalen Edenshaw points out, that the “Haida had been trading art to the mainland [for] centuries before [the establishment of European trading posts],” and that art was “a form of currency for the Haida because [it] was held up as being good on the coast.”³⁵⁷ From Indigenous perspectives, it was this already well-established coastal trade complex into which European and American traders were incorporated.

Linking Tsimshian oral histories with the Fort Simpson records, Marsden and Galois have shown how from the Tsimshian perspective, Fort Simpson was “firmly established” within the territory of Ligeex, a leading chief of the northern Tsimshian. Furthermore they assert, “there can be little doubt that the right of other nations [such as Haidas] to trade at the fort was controlled by Ligeex and his permission was also

³⁵⁶ Robert M. Galois, “Haida Trade and Trading Relationships: A Progress Report” (Submitted to the Haida Fisheries Program, October 1997), 6.

³⁵⁷ Jaalen Edenshaw. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Masset, 28 April 2014.

required.”³⁵⁸ The ways in which the HBC understood its position in Ligeex’s strategic scheme is not clear. The early Fort Simpson records lend a British perspective on the trade dynamics there, and while providing fascinating insights into this trade, are largely Euro-centric.

Though their visits were frequent, the HBC records portray the Haidas as being challenging, if not difficult traders. Underlying descriptions of the “vagabond” Massets, for example, was the fact that they were shrewd traders who had a sophisticated understanding of the history and dynamics of competition between multiple agents on the coast, including the Hudson’s Bay and Russian American Companies, American private ships (a few continued to trade during this time) and Northwest Coast groups including the Tsimshian, Nisga’a and Tlingit. While fort logbooks show that Haidas camped on a small island across from the fort, Barbeau stated that there was also a Haida encampment “on the shore, below the Hudson’s Bay Company’s post.”³⁵⁹ Either location would have provided a good viewing point for carvers to observe the fort’s architecture and daily affairs, such as the sawing of wood, an activity depicted on the ship pipe on display in NMS’s *Artistic Legacies* gallery (pictured in Figures 1, 4, 6). As noted earlier, the cabins on some ship pipes appear to

³⁵⁸ Marsden and Galois, “The Tsimshian,” 177.

³⁵⁹ Marius Barbeau and William Beynon, “The Gwenhoot of Alaska,” Microfilm 1315, American Philosophical Society, # 84. Quoted in Galois, “Haida Trade and Trading Relationships,” 5.

be based on the architecture of posts such as Fort Simpson, which carvers would have had the opportunity to observe from 1831 onward when the HBC forts began to be built along the coast.³⁶⁰ Examples of such structures represented in argillite in the Scottish collections might include ABDUA:5555 and ABDUA:5562, pictured below.



Figure 13. Argillite ship pipe

University of Aberdeen Museums

Collected by Captain William Mitchell

ABDUA: 5555

35 cm x 11.9 cm x 1.4 cm

Photo by Kaitlin McCormick, courtesy University of Aberdeen Museums

³⁶⁰ Wright, “Haida Argillite Ship Pipes,” 47.

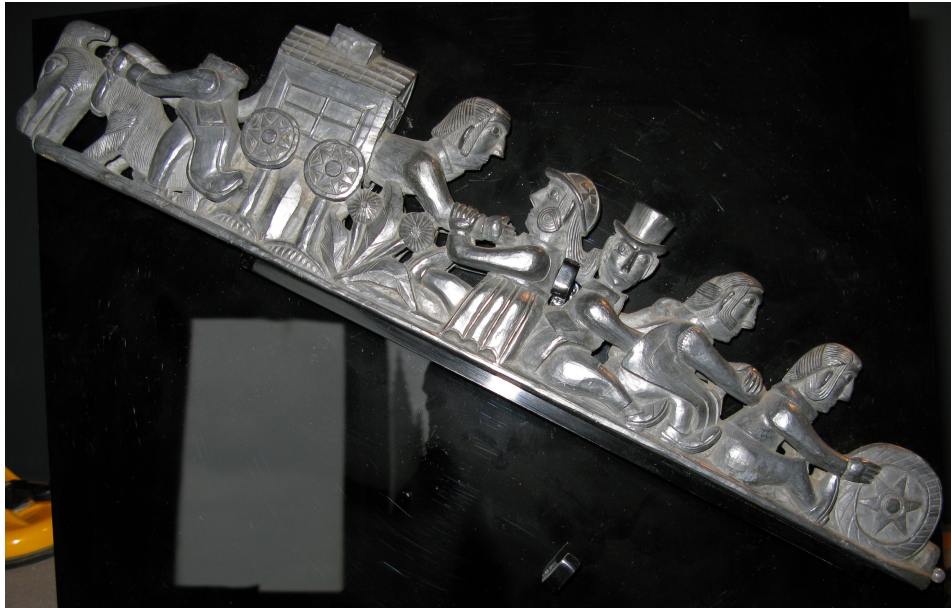


Figure 14. Argillite ship pipe

On display, “Collecting the World,” Marischal Museum

Collected by Captain William Mitchell

University of Aberdeen Museums

ABDUA: 5562

37 cm x 9 cm

Photo by Kaitlin McCormick, courtesy University of Aberdeen Museums

These works document European culture from a Haida point of view. The carvings are compelling visual perspectives to read alongside the official HBC journals, which from the mid 1830s, continued to document the movement of Skidegate, Massett, Kaigani and Cumsheewa Haidas to and from Haida Gwaii.³⁶¹

³⁶¹ According to a report by John Work, the chief trader at Fort Simpson, by 1838 the Kaigani, Tongass, Stikine, Nisga’a, Tsimshian and Haida were bringing furs to Fort Simpson. John Work to James Douglas, 20 October 1838, B.233/c/1, HBCA, cited in Marsden and Galois, “The Tsimshian,” 177 (fn. 55), 182.

3.7.1 *Shows of force and trade strategies at Fort Simpson*

Relations between Indigenous and European traders could be tense, and the *Beaver* was also used to carry out shows of force. In 1837 for example, it was used to support Fort Simpson in an armed conflict between HBC and (unidentified) Indigenous traders who had camped out on a small island opposite the fort. Fort Simpson personnel accused them of stealing firewood intended for the *Beaver*. This incident was recorded by chief trader John Work:

About 4 pm we fired a shot over those on the island which was immediately returned by a volley of musketry, we then fired several rounds of Grape and round...at their houses and canoes and kept up a smart fire with our musketry, shortly after our 2nd round the Steamer Beaver opened her fire and kept it up smartly for about half an hour. She also received after her first shot a volley of musketry but was also harmless. As we saw our shots did not do much harm we thought it prudent to cease firing, about least they would depreciate our shot guns for I must say we managed them very badly and had it not been for the able support of the Steamer Beaver, we should have cut a poor figure in the eyes of the Indians. Our musketry was more regular and had the distance not been so [great, it] would have been also not effective. Very little damage was done considering the number of shots fired on their canoes or property and what damage was done was effected by the Steamer Beaver.³⁶²

In addition to the routine duties of shipping and trading, this passage shows that the *Beaver* was used defensively and offensively. Used first for trade and to convey prestige and maritime prowess, the *Beaver* was one tool through which the HBC

³⁶² Fort Simpson journals, 27 January 1837. B.201/a/3, HBCA.

managed its “spectacle of power” in the midst of Indigenous territories.³⁶³ As Harris has argued, “the forts were the ‘power containers’ of the fur trade, loosely analogous to borderland castles or walled towns in Europe.” Even still, the events at Fort Simpson show that such defenses were not always secure; “when the HBC put...the *Beaver*, on the coast in the mid-1830s, it functioned somewhat as a mobile fort.”³⁶⁴ As I discuss further in this chapter, the *Beaver* carving reflects the complex character of the early decades of the Northwest Coast land-based fur trade.

By the spring of 1837 the *Beaver* was a regular presence on the Coast. At the same time, Fort Simpson’s journals record the regular arrival of Haidas from various Haida villages.

Sunday 16 [April 1837] Seven canoes of Skiddigate [sic] Indians headed by [Chief] Bear Skin arrived there are 50 to 60 people of them altogether on arrival they drew up in three canoes near the shore opposite the fort and had a dance and song before landing, they had themselves [?] with feathers etc. and all painted for the occasion. They have got a quantity of potatoes and whale oil with them but very few furs...³⁶⁵

While the sea otter trade had declined dramatically by the late 1830s-1840s, the journals document the ongoing but much diminished trade of sea otter furs from Skidegate and Massett people, who disputed prices with the traders of the HBC at Fort

³⁶³ Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia*, 49.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁶⁵ Fort Simpson journals, Sunday 16 April 1837. B.201/a/3, HBCA.

Simpson. Indeed, price negotiations and the challenges of trading at Fort Simpson were an issue continually documented in its journals.

Friday 4th [May 1838] ...Having different tribes trading here causes much trouble, the Northern Indians though told to do so will not keep what they get a secret but vacant [vacate?] of it as soon as they go out and the others insist upon having as much, were we to pay the Indians here less for their Sea Otters, it is not likely they would go to the Russians with them but they would dispose of them to the Northern Indians to whom we would have to give the higher price or run the risk of losing them, it is therefore considered preferable to pay the Chimsyans a little higher and endeavour to save a blanket or two per skin which is generally the case and at the same time encourage the Indians who hunt the otters and keep them less discontented. At our present rate of trade a Sea Otter from the Northern Indians costs £5.11.6 and from the Chimsyans and the rest of the Indians £4.10.6...³⁶⁶

Until the colonial period in British Columbia furs, provisions and labor were exchanged for blankets.³⁶⁷ Fort Simpson traders constantly struggled to negotiate prices with Native traders from different regions. Knowing that Fort Simpson could not control already-existing Indigenous trade networks, its traders struggled to learn and manage them in order to maximize the Company's profits. The journal extract above advises paying the Tsimshian higher for their furs to discourage them from selling to the Haidas and Tlingit, who would in turn re-sell furs to Fort Simpson at higher prices.

³⁶⁶ Fort Simpson journals, Friday 4 May 1838. B.201/a/4, HBCA.

³⁶⁷ Somerset Mackie, *Trading Beyond the Mountains*, 310.

During the mid-1830s and 1840s, Haidas traded potatoes, whale oil, land otter, marten, beaver, bear and some sea otter skins.³⁶⁸ They struggled with the Tsimshian “home guard,” the tribes that had erected permanent houses outside the fort in an attempt to control access to the Fort Simpson trade, as pictured in Figure 12. Though the Haidas were regular traders in the goods listed above, logbook references to “curiosities” are rare, probably because the HBC did not seem to have formally retailed Haida art works until the tourist trade era on the Northwest Coast. The few references to curiosities that do appear from the 1830s-40s suggest HBC employees collected argillite out of personal interest; I offer some examples below. As souvenirs of the fur trade, argillite works appear to have been traded upon private request, and therefore have been largely left out of official records such as the fort logbooks. Not until the beginning of the tourist trade on the Northwest Coast would the Company retail these objects, thereafter warranting documentation in official records such as this

1890 Fort Simpson Inspection Report:

The salesmen in the Store here deal in Indian curiosities on private account. These are brought from Queen Charlotte Islands by the Hydats [sic], bought by the salesmen in the Store for cash, and retailed to tourists and others at about 100 to 150%. The whole trade may amount to \$500.00 per annum.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁸ Fort Simpson logbook, 13 September 1841. B.201/a/6, HBCA.

³⁶⁹ J. McDougall (Inspecting Officer), “Inspection Report. Port Simpson Post. Port Simpson District.” 24-30 September 1890. B.201/e/2, HBCA.

The retailing of Haida curiosities by the 1890s is significant because references to the curio trade appear so infrequently in earlier records. As Glass has pointed out, tourism increased on the Northwest Coast with the completion of Canadian and American transcontinental railways in the 1880s. Tourism “provided yet another new economic context for the transvaluation of indigenous objects, and Native artists readily adapted their previous ceremonial and utilitarian forms to meet the growing demand for cheap and portable souvenirs from the region.”³⁷⁰ It is also interesting to note that Haida souvenirs were dealt with “on private account.” What this means is unclear, however as I suggest below, it seems that the curiosity trade of the mid-nineteenth century was also facilitated through the efforts of HBC traders who acted as middlemen between Indigenous and fort societies. Though argillite would not come to be seen as “tourist” trade items until the late-nineteenth century, they did attract curio-seeking employees and visitors to Fort Simpson in earlier decades.

George Simpson’s *Narrative of a Journey Round the World, during the Years 1841 and 1842* frequently describes the people he encountered while traveling the Northwest Coast. His vivid description of Fort Simpson conveys the complex cultural and political dynamics of this important trading post:

³⁷⁰ Glass, *Objects of Exchange*, 18.

Fort Simpson is the resort of a vast number of Indians, amounting in all to about fourteen thousand of various tribes. These are the Chimseeans [Tsimshians], who occupy the country from Douglas' Canal to Nass River, of whom about eight hundred are settled near the establishment, as home guards, under the protection of our guns. Then there are the Sebassamen from Bank's Island, and the inhabitants of Queen Charlotte's Island.³⁷¹ In addition to these, who live to the south of the International boundary, [are] many Russian Indians, such as the inhabitants of Kygarnie [Kaigani Haidas], Tomgass [Tongass Tlingit], and the Isles des Clamelsettes, likewise frequent the fort...All of these visitors to Fort Simpson are turbulent and fierce. Their broils, which are invariably attended with bloodshed, generally arise from the most trivial causes, such, for instance, as gambling quarrels, or the neglect of points of etiquette.³⁷²

Simpson portrayed the fort as a dynamic trade centre, but his remarks regarding its centrality for the manufacture (or trade) of curios are most interesting in the context of this thesis. Simpson commented that those who traded at the fort “are remarkably clever and ingenious. They carve steamers, animals, &c. very neatly in stone, wood, and ivory, imitating, in short, everything that they see, either in reality or in drawings.”³⁷³ Simpson was likely referring to the carved wooden and argillite steamships based on the *Beaver* upon which he was then actually traveling the Northwest Coast. According to art historian Robin K. Wright, “it seems certain that all of the steamer pipes dating between 1837 and 1853 are based on the form of the

³⁷¹ Sebassa was a House of the Killerwhale Clan of the Kitkatla tribe, the leaders of the southern Tsimshian. See Marsden and Galois, “The Tsimshian,” 171.

³⁷² Simpson, *Narrative*, 206.

³⁷³ Ibid.

Beaver, since she was the only steamer in Northwest Coast waters during these years.”³⁷⁴

The few requests for “curiosities” documented in the Fort Simpson logbooks suggest that the post was a centre for the trade of these kinds of objects. In February 1842, John McLoughlin Jr., the clerk in charge of Fort Stikine (and the son of chief factor John McLoughlin Sr. of Fort Vancouver), wrote to an official at Fort Simpson, asking: “I should like you would send by steamer a couple of stone pipes as a curiosity – you know it is the long pipes I mean that the natives make. McAulay I suppose knows where to get these.”³⁷⁵ It is possible that McLoughlin Jr. referred to either the long Haida motif panel pipes in production from the early 1830s, or the ship panel pipes that circulated from the early 1840s. Examples of both types are found in the Scottish collections (see Figure 15).³⁷⁶

³⁷⁴ Wright, “Haida Argillite Pipes” (1977), 80.

³⁷⁵ Letter, John McLoughlin, Jr. (Fort Stikine), to Roderick Finlayson (Fort Simpson), 14 February 1842. B.201/c/1, HBCA.

³⁷⁶ Macnair and Hoover, *The Magic Leaves* (2002), 21.



Figure 15. Haida motif argillite pipe

National Museum of Scotland

A.1923.395

49.5 cm x 7.8 cm x 1.8 cm

Image © National Museums Scotland

Though I found no further record of these pipes, McLoughlin's reference to trader Donald Macaulay gives some insight into how such objects may have circulated. Donald Macaulay (or MacAulay) of Diris-gill, Isle of Harris, signed on to HBC service at Stornoway in 1832. Having first worked in the Saskatchewan District, he arrived in the Columbia and worked there from 1834 to 1850, when he left the service of the HBC. Macaulay had been employed at Fort Vancouver (1835-36), on board the brig *Lama* (1836-37), and from 1837-1850 he was based at Fort Simpson where he worked as a middleman (1837-1841), and then as an interpreter (1841-1850).³⁷⁷ Starting work as a laborer on the lower Columbia, Macaulay would have learned the Chinook Jargon, which was used at the mouth of the Columbia River by

³⁷⁷ "Donald Macaulay." HBCA Search File. The HBCA's "Biographical Sheet Revealed" defines "middleman" as "a crewman in the middle of a boat or canoe, an unskilled position (often used interchangeably with 'labourer.'" "Interpreter" is defined as "an employee who could speak the local language, which in many cases would have been his mother tongue, so he could help the man in charge of the post conduct the trade; could also be in charge of a post." Accessed 3 November 2014, http://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/biographical/biographical_sheet_revealed.pdf

the beginning of the nineteenth century. Used to “promote exchange and contact,” writes Somerset Mackie, “Chinook was increasingly a language of work [which] facilitated exchange of furs, provisions and labour.”³⁷⁸

As the HBC worked to phase out American competition on the northern coast in the 1830s, Chinook replaced the Kygani trade jargon, a northern coastal jargon consisting of fragments of Kygani, Tsahtsinni Haida and English, the “*lingua franca*...[of] the northern Northwest Coast to Millbank Sound.”³⁷⁹ The introduction of Chinook in the 1830s was apparently due to the arrival of the steamer *Beaver*, after which the northern tribes acquired this trade pidgin understood before only by peoples of the southern Northwest Coast. Like Yale on the Fraser River in the 1820s, Macaulay’s years of experience living, trading and working with and near Indigenous people on the northern coast would have positioned him as a knowledgeable source to acquire curiosities, which, though not yet officially traded by the HBC were probably exchanged at the fort’s Indian shop where Macaulay worked. An archaeological dig at the Fort Vancouver site uncovered an argillite pipe fragment near the fort’s Indian Trade Shop, so it is likely that Macaulay too, took part in the argillite trade at Fort

³⁷⁸ Somerset Mackie, *Trading Beyond the Mountains*, 296.

³⁷⁹ Letter, Tolmie to Swan, 30 December 1878 and 6 July 1879, Swan Papers, UBC, quoted in Somerset Mackie, *Trading Beyond the Mountains*, 296, 373 f.n. 41.

Simpson's Indian trade store.³⁸⁰ Chinook jargon likely helped to facilitate the trade of early argillite carvings, itself a hybrid product of the fur trade and the contact zone.

Partial insights into the character of HBC-Indigenous trade on the Northwest Coast during the mid to late-1830s and 1840s can be accessed through records pertaining to the *Beaver* steamship and Fort Simpson, two key locations for the exchange of objects and knowledge. As "the most central point and principal establishment upon that Coast," Fort Simpson was a general trade rendezvous for northern Indigenous people, and as such it was a location at which Haida "curiosities" were sought out and obtained from at least the 1840s through the late-nineteenth century.³⁸¹ While the *Beaver* brought trade to many Indigenous communities, it was also used in aggressive shows of force on behalf of the British-run HBC. Representing prestige, ingenuity, opportunity and aggression, the *Beaver*, an apparently contradictory object, was a powerful object and a source of inspiration for Haida argillite carvers.

³⁸⁰ Theresa E. Langford, "The Archaeological Collection at Fort Vancouver National Historic Site," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 102 (1) (Spring 2001), 86-94.

³⁸¹ Simpson (Fort Vancouver), Letter to Governor and Deputy Governor and Committee of the Hudson's Bay Company, 25 November 1841. D.4/110, fo. 28, HBCA.

3.8 *The 1850s and 1860s: Fort Victoria and Fort Simpson*

Collections of argillite carvings produced during the 1850s and 60s with their fascinating mixture of European and Haida imagery are the central focus of this thesis. As I will discuss in Chapter 4, it was likely at the HBC headquarters-turned British settlement of Victoria that Hector and possibly Rae obtained their argillite collections. It is possible that Mitchell acquired his collection at Victoria too, which by the 1850s was home to a number of temporary camps established by northern Northwest Coast groups who had traveled there to trade.

Simpson's 1842 decision to phase out the Columbia Department depot at Fort Vancouver and to establish a new headquarters on Vancouver Island marked the beginning of a new British maritime commerce on the north Pacific. Fort Victoria, the new depot, was so well suited for a general, ocean-borne commerce that it remained the principal settlement on coastal British Columbia for fifty years.³⁸²

The establishment of Fort Victoria in 1843 shifted the HBC trade north and ended British commercial presence in what would thereafter become the Oregon Territory. American settlement had begun around the Columbia River in the early 1840s, and the Company had correctly anticipated that the extension of the 49th parallel under the Oregon Treaty (1846) would cut off British claims to that territory.³⁸³ Victoria gained political significance when it became the seat of government for the colony of

³⁸² Somerset Mackie, *Trading Beyond the Mountains*, 257.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 258.

Vancouver Island, created in 1849, which initiated political, social and geographical changes to the landscape. As the colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia (established in 1858) became settled, colonial governance shifted hands from HBC to settler leadership.

Between 1850 and 1854 fur trader turned colonial governor James Douglas made a number of treaties with local Aboriginal groups for land to accommodate incoming settlers.³⁸⁴ As colonists and Indigenous people competed for space and resources, a new problem in the history of Indigenous-European relations was initiated on the coast. “Natives,” writes Harris, were suddenly dealing with something else: the colonial state, and with it a conception of a settler colony and of transplanted European land uses.”³⁸⁵ Still, during these transitional and tumultuous times on Vancouver Island, the Queen Charlotte Islands “continued largely unknown to whites” and would stay that way for another two or three decades.³⁸⁶

While the islands were still relatively isolated from these developments on southern Vancouver Island and on the mainland, European encroachment intensified

³⁸⁴ “Victoria (BC),” The Canadian Encyclopedia, accessed 22 September 2015, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/victoria-bc/>

³⁸⁵ Harris, *Making Native Space*, 25. See pp. 18-30 for discussion on Douglas’s fourteen land purchases on Vancouver Island; Harris argues that it is likely that Douglas and the chiefs had different understandings of the terms of agreement.

³⁸⁶ Gough, *Gunboat Frontier*, 22.

with HBC and American gold prospectors in the early to mid-1850s. Settlement in the southern colonies brought missionaries to the northern Northwest Coast in the late 1850s, and it would not be until the mid-1870s that the Haidas would have a missionary, organized through their connection with the Tsimshian Christian model community of Metlakatla (Maps 1, 2) where for many years Haidas encamped for European trade goods and medical services.³⁸⁷ Resource exploitation, land ownership and distribution, the establishment of colonial government, missionary influence and disease were key issues in the southern colonies during these years when Haidas began to travel to Victoria for trade, work and excitement. It was in this colonial context that the Hector and Rae collections were made, as both men concluded exploratory expeditions in Victoria in 1860 and 1864, respectively.

Though I shift focus here to Victoria as the new coastal, and later colonial, headquarters, it is also worth describing the character of trade at Fort Simpson through the 1850s and 60s, as it is relevant to my discussion of the formation of argillite collections at Scottish museums in Chapter 4. Two events in particular in the 1850s, in which Fort Simpson was involved, are often cited in the literature on Indigenous-European relations on the Northwest Coast: the HBC gold mining affair on the west

³⁸⁷ John R. Henderson, "Missionary Influences on the Haida Settlement and Subsistence Patterns, 1876-1920" *Ethnohistory* 21 (4) (Autumn 1974), 305.

coast of Haida Gwaii, and the plunder of the *Susan Sturgis*, briefly noted earlier in this chapter. Despite those dramatic events, as the Fort Simpson logbooks show, the fur trade business proceeded as usual through the 1850s and 60s and many canoe-loads of Haidas continued to trade there in addition to their annual trips to Victoria. Entries also record intertribal relations between Skidegate and Massett Haidas with the Tsimshian, Nisga'a and Tlingit peoples. Disease plagued the coast prior to the devastating smallpox epidemic of 1862, and Fort Simpson records indicate that illnesses impacted Haidas' production of "curiosities." One entry from March 1858 observed that, "the Skidegates...bring few curiosities nowadays most everyone complaining with Influenza."³⁸⁸ The flow of argillite carvings into the fort would certainly have been slowed by illness, given the arduous journey to and from the Slatechuck quarry site.

It is also apparent that through these two decades the fort relied on Indigenous labor. It was noted in August 1852 that, "the fact is without the labor of 20 Indians daily the duties of the Establishment could not be performed."³⁸⁹ The cutting of cords of wood for the *Beaver* steamship, for example, was work given to Indigenous

³⁸⁸ Fort Simpson logbook, 25 March 1858. B.201/a/8, HBCA.

³⁸⁹ Fort Simpson logbook, 15 August 1852. B.201/a/7, HBCA.

workers.³⁹⁰ This work would have been done at the forts where the steamship stopped to trade, including at Victoria. In Victoria, Haidas camped at the so-called “Northerners Camp,” a temporary settlement site also occupied by the Tsimshian, Stikine Tlingit, Heiltsuk [Bella Bella] and Kwakwaka’wakw. By the 1860s, the Haidas had temporary camps at Cadboro Bay east of Victoria, and at Ogden Point to the southwest from where they would be evicted by government officials fearing the spread of smallpox in 1862.³⁹¹

European settlement at Vancouver Island followed slowly in the wake of the 1858 gold rush along the Fraser River. Fisher notes that because the colonists attributed Victoria’s social ills to Indigenous people and not to themselves (there was a “sudden influx of a large and unstable European population”), there was “constant pressure in the early years of settlement, both from the colonists and from their representatives in the legislature, to have the Indians removed from the vicinity of Victoria.”³⁹² On 20 April 1859 for example, “A Canoe of Hyders [Haidas] arrived [at

³⁹⁰ Somerset Mackie, *Trading Beyond the Mountains*, 137.

³⁹¹ Robert Thomas Boyd, *The Coming of the Spirit of Pestilence: Introduced Infectious Diseases and Population Decline Among Northwest Coast Indians, 1774-1874* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), 176-183.

³⁹² Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 113.

Fort Simpson] from Victoria and reported that [another group of] Hyders would soon be [at Fort Simpson] from Victoria having been ordered away from that place.”³⁹³

Fisher has discussed how before 1858 (i.e. before the Fraser River gold rush and the establishment of the colony of British Columbia) Vancouver Island “held little attraction for settlers.”³⁹⁴ Settlement, of course, would put pressure on “what, practically, had always been Native land.”³⁹⁵ In 1851, London’s Colonial Office appointed James Douglas to the position of Governor of Vancouver Island as they believed that his fur trade experience qualified him to manage the colony and relations with the Native peoples there. Douglas’s “dual role symbolized the transitional phase from fur trade to settlement.”³⁹⁶ The land issue and competition for resources on the southern Northwest Coast was becoming more urgent in the 1850s and 60s.

“Underlying the conflicts between Indians and prospectors,” writes historian J.R. Miller, “were irreconcilable desires for territory and resources. Indian groups often tried to stop the ingress of prospectors” as the Haidas did at Mitchell Inlet in 1852. In the 1860s, Miller writes, “a minority of settlers proved troublesome...[the] fundamental reason [being] that settlers on Vancouver Island and in the valleys of the

³⁹³ Fort Simpson logbook, 20 April 1859. B.201/a/8, HBCA.

³⁹⁴ Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 49.

³⁹⁵ Harris, *Making Native Space*, 17.

³⁹⁶ Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 52-53. See also Harris, *Making Native Space*, 16.

interior wanted exclusive access to lands that Indians regarded as theirs. The Indians, as they had with the gold seekers, sometimes tried to resist the invasion.”³⁹⁷ Again, Haidas were isolated from the more urgent land issues faced by southern Indigenous groups like the Songhees, but Haidas were keen to prevent western presence in their own territories, especially the theft of their land and resources.³⁹⁸ Though settlement signaled the end of fur trade society on Vancouver Island, colonization there happened slowly, with little resistance from the HBC, who used Victoria as a base from which to control the more lucrative fur-bearing region of New Caledonia, and, from 1858, the colony of British Columbia. Whereas fur traders had worked, largely out of self-interest, to understand Indigenous cultures through the exchange of objects, language and kin relations, settlers had no need to pursue these goals and were not conciliatory. “The settler,” Fisher writes, “came to re-create an alien civilization on the frontier, while the fur trader had to operate largely within the context of the indigenous culture.”³⁹⁹ When settlers streamed in through the early 1850s, their influence over colonial affairs and Indigenous policies increased.

³⁹⁷ J.R. Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2001; 1989), 189.

³⁹⁸ Still, as Boyd has points out, the Haidas were not vaccinated to the extent that the Songhees were, and Haida Gwaii’s isolation made its people particularly vulnerable to European diseases.

³⁹⁹ Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 60.

While the Oregon Treaty did not interrupt the fur trade to the north of the forty-ninth parallel, increased settlement sparked a number of violent and fatal incidents between settlers and Indigenous peoples south of the border that would continue into the mid-1850s. Morally and politically positioned somewhere between American and Indigenous interests Douglas, to “maintain a façade of neutrality...provided the Americans with arms, ammunition, and the use of the *Beaver*.”⁴⁰⁰ Here is another example of the use of this ship for suppressing Indigenous resistance and asserting Euro-American dominance. Beginning as a “floating general store,” which “became the material link between Fort Victoria and the Indian trappers and consumers along the seven or eight hundred miles of the Northwest Coast” in the 1830s and 40s, Northwest Coast people must have also seen this ship to represent Euro-Canadian aggression.⁴⁰¹

Witnessing increasing European encroachment, the Haida “were unenthusiastic about the arrival of white men to exploit resources that [they] regarded as theirs.”⁴⁰² While they continued to trade at Fort Simpson and elsewhere, bringing goods and some furs to the fort rather than hosting HBC trade at their villages, Haidas began to visit Victoria annually in the early 1850s. There, they would have witnessed the

⁴⁰⁰ Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 61.

⁴⁰¹ Gough, *Gunboat Frontier*, 22.

⁴⁰² Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 69.

sustained and more urgent struggles of southern peoples like the Songhees, whose reserve was in Victoria (though the Songhees had access to vaccines and suffered fewer smallpox casualties than the northern groups).

Having purchased several lots of Native land on Vancouver Island, Douglas “constructed a human geography composed of settlements and Indian country.”⁴⁰³ As a market place and place of potential employment, Victoria attracted people from the northern Coast. Though not so much a pressing issue in the decades preceding colonization, the essential conflict between settlers and Indigenous peoples was over land, which was “as crucial to the continuation of Indian culture as it was to the aims of the settlers...As far as the Indians were concerned, the land was theirs, as it had been from time immemorial.”⁴⁰⁴ In the province of British Columbia today, the land issue continues to trouble the relationship between Indigenous people and settler-Canadians.

3.9 Exploitation and the grounds for resistance

Harris has pointed out the “contradictions and the cultural overlaps and borrowings inherent in colonialism. Colonialism spoke with many voices and was often deeply

⁴⁰³ Harris, *Making Native Space*, 22.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., xviii; Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 102-103.

troubled about its own contradictions, while tending to override them with its own sheer power and momentum.”⁴⁰⁵ As I noted earlier, the Haida were isolated from the population surge that occurred in the southern colonies following the 1858 and 1866 gold rushes on the mainland. Though the HBC, wrote Tolmie in 1866, “know as a rule they are liked and trusted by the natives,”⁴⁰⁶ the Haida’s resistance to resource exploitation by the HBC and others through the middle and later decades of the nineteenth century set a precedent of distrust of Euro-American and Canadian presences on Haida Gwaii. As I discuss further in Chapter 5, contemporary Haida artists’ anxieties around unauthorized access to the Slatechuck site may be viewed through a longer lens that sees a history of relentless attempts at resource extraction and encroachment on Haida land.

Martineau argues that soon after the exploration period of the late eighteenth century, “the maritime fur trade brought the first in a series of colonizing discourses that have positioned Haida Gwaii as a source of primary resources that could be extracted and transported to centers where they would be processed.”⁴⁰⁷ Though a

⁴⁰⁵ Harris, *Making Native Space*, xvii.

⁴⁰⁶ Letter, W.F. Tolmie to William Duncan, 28 May 1866. B.226/b/28, HBCA.

⁴⁰⁷ Joel Martineau, “Otter Skins, Clearcuts, and Ecotourists: Re-Resourcing Haida Gwaii,” *Proceedings of the 1999 International Symposium on Coastal and Marine Tourism: Balancing Tourism and Conservation*, edited by Marc Miller, Jan Auyong and Nina Hadley (Seattle: Washington Sea Grant

fuller history of resource extraction on Haida Gwaii is beyond the scope of this thesis, the following discussion presents key instances of resistance to resource exploitation in which the history of argillite carving as an exclusively Haida practice can begin to be understood.

In 1850, Skotsgai, the chief of the Pebble Town People, and his wife reported to HBC officials that they had found gold while living at Kaisun on the west coast of Moresby Island.⁴⁰⁸ Though this story has been told in other sources it is significant for its insights into relations between Haidas and the HBC during the early-mid 1850s.

The brief gold rush on Haida Gwaii is a link, more specifically, to the argillite collection at the University of Aberdeen, because its collector, the Aberdonian HBC ship captain William Mitchell, was involved in these events as the captain of the HBC ship *Una*, and witnessed the skirmishes that reportedly took place between the Haidas and the HBC men who attempted to blast for gold on their land.

When Albert Edward Edenshaw initially guided chief factor John Work to the site by canoe in 1851, Captain Mitchell and Fort Simpson chief trader WH McNeill followed soon after on the *Una*. This party of men was “said to have mined gold ore

Program, Corvallis, OR: Oregon Sea Grant Program; Vancouver, BC: Oceans Blue Foundation, 2002), 237.

⁴⁰⁸ Wright, *Northern Haida Master Carvers*, 159 (citing MacDonald 1983:55). Skotsgai later changed his name to Captain Gold, which is now a hereditary name.

worth approximately \$75,000 before the vein was depleted.”⁴⁰⁹ Their expeditions were met with resistance, and McNeill’s report describes the alleged difficulties they experienced in the blasting process. In a November 1851 report to James Douglas, McNeill wrote,

I am sorry to inform you that we were obliged to leave off blasting, and quit the place for Fort Simpson, on account of the annoyance we experienced from the natives. They arrived in large numbers, say 30 canoes, and were much pleased to see us on our first arrival. When they saw us blasting and turning out the Gold in such large quantities they became excited and commenced depredations on us, stealing the tools, and taking at least one half of the Gold that was thrown out by a blast...The natives were very jealous of us when they saw that we could obtain Gold by blasting, - they had no idea that so much could be found below the surface – they said that it was not good that we should take all the Gold away, - if we did so, that they would not have any thing to trade with other vessels should any arrive. In fact they told us to be off. The Chiefs have no power over the lower order, and of course cannot prevent them from plundering or committing any act of violence on Strangers.⁴¹⁰

McNeill’s description of the Haidas’ jealousy could be interpreted instead as their resentment of, and resistance to, the miners’ attempts to exploit and steal materials from their land. Haidas’ resistance to resource exploitation continues on Haida Gwaii

⁴⁰⁹ Wright, *Northern Haida Master Carvers*, 160. For brief histories of these events, see also Kathleen E. Dalzell, *The Queen Charlotte Islands, 1774-1966*, vol. 1 (Madeira Park, B.C. Harbour Publishing, 1989) and Dalzell, *The Queen Charlotte Islands, Place and Names*, vol. 2 (Madeira Park, B.C. Harbour Publishing, 1989); Captain John T. Walbran, *British Columbia Coast Names, 1592-1906* (Vancouver: J.J. Douglas Ltd. For the Vancouver Public Library, 1971 (1909)), 340.

⁴¹⁰ Letter, WF McNeill to James Douglas, 20 November 1851. Great Britain Colonial Office. Correspondence with the Hudson’s Bay Company. Vol. 1-3; 1822-1858 (GR-0332). Vol. 1, p. 388, BCPA.

today.⁴¹¹ “In my opinion,” wrote McNeill, “we shall never be able to work at the gold without an imposing force.”⁴¹² Abandoning the operation, the Company made off with the \$75, 000 worth of gold on the *Una*, bound for Victoria, however the brig was wrecked at Neah Bay, in what is now Washington State. The HBC returned in 1852 on another ship, the *Recovery*, and both they and Haidas negotiated “a good working agreement” though upon blasting the miners saw what turned out to be only a pocket of gold.⁴¹³ That year, Governor Douglas wrote to John Kennedy, a chief trader of mixed descent at Fort Simpson, whose cultural background and experience with Indigenous peoples led the HBC to appoint him to head up the expedition.

It is most desirable that this friendly feeling [between Haidas and the HBC on the Queen Charlotte Islands] should be maintained and increased as it is the intention of the Company to maintain the footing we have already acquired on the Island and thoroughly to explore its mineral resources. A practical geologist with several assistants are now on the route from Canada to this place who will be sent on to join you as they arrive there. The researches of a scientific person are in many respects highly desirable and will lead either to important discoveries or to the conviction that the Q.C. Island is not productive in the precious or useful metals.”⁴¹⁴

⁴¹¹ See Ian Gill, *All That We Say is Ours: Guujaaw and the Reawakening of the Haida Nation* (Vancouver, Toronto, Berkeley: Douglas & McIntyre, 2009).

⁴¹² McNeill, “Journal of Proceedings on board the Honorable Hudson Bay Co’s Brigantine ‘Una,’ Mitchell’s Harbour, N.W.A., 1851,” 25 October 1851. A/C/205./Un1, BCPA.

⁴¹³ Dalzell, *The Queen Charlotte Islands, Book 2*, 109-110.

⁴¹⁴ Douglas to Kennedy, 4 June 1852. B.226/b/4, HBCA.

The HBC's operations in resource exploitation are discussed more fully elsewhere in relation to the Company's developing role in facilitating colonization on Vancouver Island.⁴¹⁵ This passage nonetheless indicates the Company's interest in the Queen Charlotte Islands as part of a longer-term vision of their usefulness. Still, events such as the gold mining fiasco and the plunder of the *Susan Sturgis* were perhaps the sort of events that led one HBC official to comment soon after that, "the natives of Queen Charlotte's Island are so savage and dangerous that it has been found safe and more convenient to collect the furs to be procured in the Island by trading with parties of the natives who bring their furs to Fort Simpson...consequently no permanent trading post has been established on Queen Charlotte's Island."⁴¹⁶ From the HBC's perspective, this trade arrangement – Haidas bringing furs to Fort Simpson – occurred from the outset of the establishment of Fort Simpson, though evidence indicates a much longer history of Haida-Nisga'a-Tsimshian trade on the mainland. In the early 1850s though the Company was interested in establishing a post on the Queen Charlotte Islands, the idea was abandoned on the basis of practicality:

The only fur bearing animals found on Queen Charlotte Island, are martens, Bears, Land and Sea Otters, and they are not numerous, and could not be

⁴¹⁵ See Harris, *Making Native Space*, 19; Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company* (Vol. II), 754-784; Somerset Mackie, *Trading Beyond the Mountains*, 240-241.

⁴¹⁶ Letter, A. Colville to S. Walcott, 27 June 1853. Great Britain Colonial Office. Correspondence with the Hudson's Bay Company. Vol. 1-3; 1822-1858 (GR-0332). Vol. II, pp. 139-140, BCPA.

procured in sufficient quantities to defray the expense of an establishment, and moreover the great part of that trade is now procured at Fort Simpson. So far then as the trade in furs is concerned there would be no advantage in forming a Post on Queen Charlotte's Island, which could add little to the quantity of Furs at present collected on the coast.⁴¹⁷

Douglas ultimately decided to forego further explorations on the islands until they knew "something more of the country, and [could] decide with certainty as to the most favourable situation for mining..."⁴¹⁸

Though foreign interest in Haida Gwaii was "sporadic" after the depletion of the sea otter, Douglas's annexation of the islands to the colony of Vancouver Island in 1852 reflected British fears of the arrival of a potentially excessive presence of American prospectors.⁴¹⁹ Following the brief gold rush of the early 1850s, subsurface mining occurred on the islands through the late nineteenth century. In 1865, the Queen Charlotte Coal Mining Company was formed in Victoria to exploit the anthracite deposits discovered at the Cowgitz coalmine near Slatechuck Mountain in Skidegate Inlet. The mine was abandoned in 1872, one year after B.C.'s confederation with

⁴¹⁷ Douglas to Barclay, 23 August 1852. B.226/b/6, HBCA.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid. According to Dalzell, a private trading post established in Massett in the early 1850s was later taken over by the Hudson's Bay Company. See Dalzell, *The Queen Charlotte Islands, 1774 to 1966* (1968), cited in Stearns, *Haida Culture in Custody*, 33. Van Den Brink states that, "it was not until 1869 that the Hudson's Bay Company established an agency at Masset, an agency which did not prosper and was closed in 1898." *The Haida Indians: Cultural Change Mainly Between 1876 and 1970* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), 6.

⁴¹⁹ Martineau, "Otter Skins, Clearcuts, and Ecotourists," 239.

Canada. During its operation, it was “connected with the coast by a substantial tramway, a wharf and the necessary buildings for the accommodation of the men erected, with screens and all the appliances for a large output.”⁴²⁰

The same year, James Richardson, an official of the Geological Survey, visited Skidegate Inlet “at the request of gentlemen interested in the Cowgitz Coal Mines.” In the summer of 1878, the geologist George Mercer Dawson of the Geological Survey of Canada examined the region, and based his “Report on the Queen Charlotte Islands” (1878) upon Richardson’s earlier report and map, and Dawson’s own notes.⁴²¹ Richardson reported on passage beds, “generally associated with black carbonaceous argillites,” at the Cowgitz mine that held a seam of anthracite coal. “There are those [argillites],” Dawson writes, “to which Mr. Richardson refers as being quarried by the Indians at a spot some miles up Slate Chuck Creek, and though they there hold no distinct coal seam, films of anthracite are still found.”⁴²² The first appendix to Dawson’s “Report on the Queen Charlotte Islands, 1878” is a lengthy

⁴²⁰ Dawson, “Report on the Queen Charlotte Islands, 1878” for the Geological Survey of Canada. Montreal: Dawson Brothers (1880), 71b.

⁴²¹ Dawson, “Report,” 63b. According to Cole, James Richardson “contributed fifteen argillite carvings” to the anthropological collections of the Geological Survey museum in Ottawa. Richardson selected these works as “typical or fine. The carvings had a particular appropriateness since it was Richardson who had first surveyed Slatechuck quarry, the single source of argillite on the islands, and had given it that name.” *Captured Heritage*, 79.

⁴²² Dawson, “Report,” 67b.

ethnography of the Haida. Identified by Cole as the “the earliest substantial [collection] to come from the Queen Charlottes,” apparently none of the approximately 115 objects Dawson acquired in 1878 at the villages of Tanu, Cumshewa, Skidegate and Massett were argillite carvings, perhaps because as apparent evidence of culture change and Haidas’ involvement with European markets, it was not representative of “traditional” (i.e. pre-contact) Haida life. Dawson did, however, make later argillite collections for Ottawa’s museum of the Geological Survey, which by 1877 had expanded its mandate to include the study of plants, animals, and ethnology.⁴²³

Through the mid to late-nineteenth century, Haidas were no doubt familiar with American, British and, after B.C.’s 1871 confederation, Canadian motivations for resource exploitation. It is therefore likely that the Richardson (1872) and Dawson (1878) surveys prompted the Scottish amateur ethnologist James Deans to comment upon “The Slate Quarries” and of Haidas’ the concerns regarding the argillite source they had used for generations. Deans worked in coal exploration for the Queen Charlotte Coal Company in 1869-70, 1872 and 1882. In 1882 Israel Wood Powell, the Superintendent of Indian Affairs in Victoria, commissioned Deans to report on the

⁴²³ Cole, *Captured Heritage*, 292; “About Us: The History of the Museum,” Canadian Museum of History, accessed 14 November 2014, <http://www.historymuseum.ca/about-us/about-the-museum/history-of-the-museum>.

conditions and land reserve problems faced by the Haidas of the Queen Charlotte Islands.⁴²⁴ Deans wrote,

As the slate carving of the east Coast [i.e. Skidegate] Indians is an industry which ought to be fostered, not only because they bring to light the ingenuity of these people, but also because they are learned to be industrious, by making those hours a source of profit, which otherwise would be spent in idleness. Fearing that the seam of Anthracite Coal underlying the slate quarries would be found profitable to work, and the ground wherein they get this slate being taken up for mining purposes, they would lose all right to them unless previously secured to them, that it is to all of the [Haida] tribes who wish to stake advantage of working this slate. What they ask is either that the small piece of ground where these quarries exist be reserved to them, or, if not, the right of working them in order to get a supply of material, which if stoped [sic] would deprive them of a great source of working an honest livelihood. Hoping you will consider these reports at your earliest convenience...James Deans.⁴²⁵

By the 1880s, the period in which artist Charles Edenshaw (Albert Edward's nephew) was carving, the Haidas had seen a century of resource extraction beginning in their waters, which continued, slowly but aggressively through the nineteenth century, to exploit their surface and subsurface resources. Though the fur trade years increased the flow of wealth into Indigenous societies and brought new technologies which enabled artistic expansion, this more or less "mutually beneficial" relationship gave way to colonial developments that led to increased inequality between Indigenous and settler people, Indigenous disempowerment and a relationship of federal

⁴²⁴ Douglas Cole, "James Deans," Dictionary of Canadian Biography, accessed 14 November 2014, http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/deans_james_13E.html

⁴²⁵ James Deans, "Reports on Queen Charlotte Islands" (1883). A/E/P87/D34, BCPA.

paternalism.⁴²⁶ Describing the Haidas as showing a “special aptitude in construction, carving, and other forms of handiwork,” Dawson advised that, “it should be the endeavour of those interested in their welfare to promote their education in the simpler mechanical arts, by the practice of which they may be able to earn an honest livelihood.”⁴²⁷ Dawson and others saw potential in argillite carving as a cottage industry.

As Martineau points out Dawson envisioned the Queen Charlotte Islands as a place of wasted space and resources, but which had the potential to support the new Canadian economy.⁴²⁸ Perhaps Dawson’s most prescient observation was his acknowledgement of the Haida nation and Haida title to the land, which “in the case of these people, will be a matter of considerable difficulty, for...they hold their lands not in any loose general way, but have the whole of the islands divided and apportioned off as the property of certain families, customs fully developed as to the inheritance and transfer of lands.”⁴²⁹ Though the ownership of specific lands by Haida families and clans in historical and present times is beyond the scope of this thesis, Dawson’s insights from 1882 resonate today with the contemporary Haida title case, as well as

⁴²⁶ Glass, *Objects of Exchange*, 15.

⁴²⁷ Dawson, “Report on the Queen Charlotte Islands,” 174b.

⁴²⁸ Martineau, “Otter Skins, Clearcuts, and Ecotourists,” 239. Harris (2001:18) also discusses HBC (i.e. British) views of seemingly unoccupied land as wasteland.

⁴²⁹ Dawson, “Report on the Queen Charlotte Islands,” 174b-175b.

(indirectly) with Haida proprietorship of the argillite quarry site and of the material itself.

In 1941 the “Black Slate 11” quarry site of 17.7 hectares was designated a federal reserve.⁴³⁰ Reserved to the Skidegate Band, Slatechuck – named by Richardson, and still widely referred to as such on Haida Gwaii – is also used by several Massett artists and carvers. As I discuss in later chapters, argillite’s exclusivity as a Haida resource is common knowledge among locals of both Haida and non-Haida heritage on Haida Gwaii. Still, my conversations with Haida argillite carvers indicate there is some anxiety around access and use of the site and material, and the theme of proprietorship is taken up in Chapter 5.

3.10 Conclusion: *objects from the contact zone*

This chapter has characterized the middle decades of the nineteenth century Northwest Coast as dynamic and ambivalent. Exchange between Indigenous peoples and Europeans occurred frequently at trading sites and along fur trade routes, and contact increased in intensity with the influx of settlers mid-century. Though some sources, such as Simpson’s *Narrative*, recall the early fur trade with a sense of nostalgia and

⁴³⁰ Drew and Wilson, *Argillite*, 47-48; Government of Canada, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, “Black Slate 11,” accessed 25 September 2014, http://pse5-esd5.ainc-inac.gc.ca/fnp/Main/Search/RVDetail.aspx?RESERVE_NUMBER=07700&lang=eng

appreciation of what we would today call an intercultural mix of people, languages and knowledge, other sources such as the HBC logbooks and correspondence show the daily experience of fur trade life to have been tense and often violent. This contact zone, in which Indigenous-European relations were in constant flux, is the context in which Haida argillite carvings like those pictured in this chapter were created.

As products of this dynamic and unstable contact zone, these objects were circulated by early fur traders as the “curiosities” of Native others. In turn, the argillite ship pipes like those pictured in Figures 11, 13 and 14, with their depictions of Haida and European figures, attest to the transforming character of the nineteenth century Northwest Coast. Hybrid objects, as Glass has pointed out, are “boundary objects,” the “apparently unclassifiable” products of complex intercultural encounters.⁴³¹ Still, it is by looking at such objects that a more complicated but more accurate picture of the character of those encounters emerges, and hybridity as Curtis pointed out in Chapter 2 is now seen to authenticate the messy and unstable nature of colonial experiences.

Whether wrapped as “curiosities” (as they were in the mid-nineteenth century) or otherwise, argillite carvings are continually reclassified. As Kramer pointed out, Northwest Coast art, of which argillite is no exception, has been many things to many

⁴³¹ Glass, *Objects of Exchange*, 7.

different people.⁴³² As I have pointed out, by the late 1870s argillite carving had come to be seen by Euro-Canadians such as George M. Dawson as inauthentic but harmless tourist trade items, a patronizing view that reflected settler-colonial ideas about the place of Aboriginal peoples in Canadian society. Having outlined the changing relationship between Aboriginal people and newcomers to the Northwest Coast from the 1820s to 60s, the decades in which these Scottish museum collections were organized, Chapter 4 focuses on the work of the collectors themselves in the commercial and colonial processes that shaped the modern Northwest Coast, and the ways these argillite carvings transformed in status and value according to the agendas of the collectors.

⁴³² Kramer, *Switchbacks*, 6.

Chapter 4: Early Scottish museum collections of Haida argillite carving

4.1 *Introduction*

Produced in the early through middle decades of the nineteenth century, the works of Haida argillite carving now in the collections of the Perth Museum and Art Gallery, the University of Aberdeen Museums and the National Museums Scotland were formed in the context of a multi-sited flow of people, objects and information – an “unequal symbiosis”⁴³³ – between Indigenous and fort societies, as the constant movement of goods and people contributed to the global market in furs and other products from North America, Europe, the UK and Asia. These carvings were objects of exchange, produced in a contact zone whose changing character, charted in Chapter 3, sets the stage for the following discussion. These objects reflect the agency and economic acumen of their makers in a competitive marketplace, for which the decline of the sea otter trade, once the Haidas’ main economic outlet, put them in a challenging position to compete in a new context of the land-based trade. Made for export, early nineteenth century collectors of argillite carvings saw them as curiosities and examples of native industry, evidence of the skill and ingenuity of an “other” people who, by late 1800s, were considered imperilled by European settlement and

⁴³³ Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002), 54.

colonization. The argillite works, part of broader Northwest Coast collections made by the Scottish collectors Colin Robertson, William Mitchell, James Hector and John Rae, all participate, in different ways, in stories of travel, commerce, colonialism and science. This chapter traces a shift in the character of Indigenous-European exchanges and the changing and ambiguous terms by which these objects were constituted, from curiosities and souvenirs, to ethnographic “specimens.”

We can trace the development of attitudes towards Indigenous others in European records of trade, exploration and colonization. Where fur traders saw Indigenous peoples as suppliers, adversaries, and, as I showed last chapter, partners and relations, by mid-century, scientists such as James Hector, who researched various colonial infrastructures, saw a seemingly imperilled and impoverished people struggling to get by on the “borders” of civilization in developing urban centres like Victoria.⁴³⁴

Traders were (to an extent) familiar with where Indigenous people came from and with their seasonal work cycles and relationships with the land and with each other. For fur traders, the “Indians” – often named in fort logbooks by group or individually in the case of high-ranking leaders – were familiar others. But by the

⁴³⁴James Hector and W.S.W. Vaux, “Notice of the Indians Seen by the Exploring Expedition under the Command of Captain Palliser,” *Transactions of the Royal Ethnological Society of London*, Vol. 1 (1861).

middle and second half of the nineteenth century, Indigenous peoples would be described in reports such as those of the Palliser Expedition as a problematic other, believed to be corrupted by European influence but with the potential to be civilized through the cultivation of land and adoption of a settled, Christian lifestyle. By the time James Hector and John Rae visited Victoria (in 1859 and 1864, respectively) the use of land, resources, and the place of Indigenous peoples in the colonial situation was at issue and formed the subject of official reports to the British government and the scientific societies to which these men belonged. Still, while they helped shape the colonial landscape through their involvement in exploration, mapping and reports on the economic viability of the colonial territories, collectors like Hector and Rae were keen observers of the diversity and differences in Indigenous cultures and societies, and they advocated for the fair treatment of Native people, however informed their judgments were by mid-nineteenth century assumptions on race and society.⁴³⁵

Sometimes coded as “curiosities” in collector and museum records, towards the second half of the nineteenth century, the argillite carvings are referred to as

⁴³⁵ Harris writes about the complexities of ideas around race in settler society in the mid-1860s: “There was a range of opinion on most Native questions. There were many biological racists, convinced that Natives were inherently inferior, but there were others who thought Natives were essentially the same as anyone else and in time would become fully civilized...But even those who thought more generously about Native people assumed that they were savages, that they used the land in inferior ways or not at all...” *Making Native Space*, 54. As I show further in this chapter, Hector advised on the improvement of Native people through agriculture and settlement.

“specimens.” Nicholas Thomas has examined these overlapping terms with respect to the development of cultures of collection, a discussion I return to later in this chapter.⁴³⁶

Drawing from research at Scottish museums and in Canadian archives, this chapter investigates nineteenth-century collecting on the Northwest Coast. I look at why collectors acquired argillite carving (among the other things they collected), and assess the relationship between collecting and the developments of colonialism. This chapter accounts for the “wider world” of Scottish Northwest Coast collections, and considers the ways in which multiple actors – traders and merchants, naturalists, scientists, colonial officials and missionaries mobilized theories on the objects of others. The focus of this chapter is the relationships between collectors and objects.

What kind of collectors were Robertson, Mitchell, Hector and Rae? In order to understand museum collections and their legacies, we must as Thomas suggests, “ask why these objects were acquired and what their collectors thought they were doing.”⁴³⁷ In turn, the relationship between collector and objects will help to understand the cultures of collecting and the regimes of value in which these objects were acquired and through which they have passed. More broadly, this analysis provides a

⁴³⁶ Nicholas Thomas, “Licensed Curiosity: Cook’s Pacific Voyages,” in *The Cultures of Collecting*, eds. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1994).

⁴³⁷ Thomas, *Entangled Objects*, 126.

framework to consider how the character of relations between Indigenous peoples and newcomers changed through the middle decades of the nineteenth century, and to understand the role of objects in the articulation of human difference during that time. The chapter tells the story of each collector separately and concludes by discussing the biographical depth, or wrappings, of museum objects, a key theme of this thesis. First, I propose a framework for thinking about collectors and collections.

4.2 Collectors and collections

Though recent scholarship on collecting has emphasized the networks of agency at work in the building of museum collections, the personal aspect to collecting, as Baudrillard observed, cannot be overlooked.⁴³⁸ The collections this thesis investigates share some basic history: each belonged to Scottish collectors with ties to the HBC in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. They also play into complex and sometimes interrelated professional networks, reflecting something of the

⁴³⁸ Jean Baudrillard, "The System of Collecting," in *The Cultures of Collecting*, eds. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 7-24. See Sarah Byrne, Anne Clarke, Rodney Harrison and Robin Torrence, "Networks, Agents and Objects: Frameworks for Unpacking Museum Collections," in *Unpacking the Collection: Networks of Material and Social Agency in the Museum*, eds. Byrne, Clarke, Harrison and Torrence (New York, Dordrecht, Heidelberg, London: Springer, 2011), 3-26.

personalities, professions and objectives of the collectors.⁴³⁹ How did these objects work in the worlds of their collectors?

Elsner and Cardinal describe the “cultures of collecting” as a framework to think through the “psychological and social” phenomena that inform collections.⁴⁴⁰ This chapter investigates the personal meanings these objects (may have) held for collectors, as well as the social and professional networks that supported and shaped their formation. As Byrne points out, it is “impossible” to think of nineteenth century collectors as having worked in isolation. Collectors relied on technologies that enabled travel and the transportation of objects, on the “creator communities” who produced the things they collected, and on the museum institutions to store, care for and interpret the collections.⁴⁴¹ Collectors as I will show, also worked within particular personal and cultural worldviews, and their collecting was informed by social conditions including class, race and gender.⁴⁴² As Clifford has pointed out, a “critical

⁴³⁹ “The objects in our lives,” writes Baudrillard, “represent something...profoundly related to subjectivity.” “The System of Collecting,” in *The Cultures of Collecting*, 7.

⁴⁴⁰ Elsner and Cardinal, “Introduction,” in *The Cultures of Collecting*, 5.

⁴⁴¹ Byrne et al., “Networks, Agents and Objects,” 11.

⁴⁴² In her analysis of over one hundred private collections of Alaskan Native art from the late-nineteenth century, Molly Lee shows that gender was a factor in determining the types of objects collected, their provenance, the time that was spent on collecting and the “eventual disposition of the objects.” From “Tourism and Taste in Alaska: Collecting Native Art in Alaska at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” in *Unpacking Culture: Art and Commodity in Colonial and Postcolonial Worlds*, ed. Ruth B. Phillips and Christopher B. Steiner (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1999), 277.

history of collecting is concerned with what from the material world specific groups and individuals chose to preserve, value and exchange.”⁴⁴³

Objects also circulate in various political dimensions, which inform the “regimes of value” through which they pass.⁴⁴⁴ In the mid-nineteenth century, argillite carvings circulated as commodities: their Haida makers, seeking to supplement their own wealth, intended them to be. They were then, upon collection, incorporated into the social and political worlds of their collectors, and it is by tracing these movements that we might form an understanding of the various meanings of these objects.

Appadurai has shown us that it is only through an analysis of the social life of things (as “things-in-motion”) that we can understand the meanings of objects in their human and social context.⁴⁴⁵ Kopytoff has shown us furthermore that the commodity status is merely one kind of value that objects may enter into and depart from at any given point in their social lives.⁴⁴⁶ Upon collection for example, the carvings’ commodity phase was interrupted and they took on other meanings. Appadurai argues that politics is the central “link between regimes of value and specific flows of commodities.”⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴³ Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 221.

⁴⁴⁴ Myers, “Introduction,” in *The Empire of Things*, 7.

⁴⁴⁵ Arjun Appadurai, “Commodities and the politics of value,” in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan Pearce (Routledge: Chicago and New York, 1994), 77.

⁴⁴⁶ Kopytoff, “The cultural biography of things,” in *The Social Life of Things*, 64-94.

⁴⁴⁷ Appadurai, “Commodities and the politics of value,” in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, 90.

Why and how did the collectors investigated here pick argillite carvings out of circulation and reclassify them as curiosities, souvenirs or specimens? In what ways did the collectors present themselves, within their own social and political milieus?

The following discussion aims to make sense of these collections in light of the status and profession of the collectors and the destinations of the objects.

4.3 The collections of Colin Robertson (and James Murray Yale), PMAG

The story of Colin Robertson's Northwest Coast collections now at the PMAG is also the story of his friend and colleague James Murray Yale, introduced in Chapter 3 as the Canadian fur trader from whom the bulk of Robertson's Salish collection originated. Both men rose to positions of considerable rank in the HBC (Robertson to chief factor, Yale to chief trader) and participated in the social and political movements required of traders keen for mobility and promotion. Robertson however, with his Scottish merchant-class background and lasting ties to Perth, was a man of two worlds, for whom acquiring the objects of others was an opportunity to confer prestige and status of wider social and political significance. I suggest here that Robertson's Northwest Coast collections, which included two argillite pipes (out of a total of four stone pipes), were put towards his self-styled image as a man of means, mobility and knowledge. The "Robertson collection" was crystallized upon its 1833

entry into the ledger book of the PLAS, while Yale's role in its formation would be forgotten until the last decades of the twentieth century when collecting as a social practice developed as a topic of academic investigation.⁴⁴⁸ The following discussion accounts for the formation of Robertson's collections. I suggest that he appropriated these things to manifest his own "breadth and command" in fur trade society, and that the objects functioned as markers of "personal history, [and as] an expression of [Robertson's] accomplishments."⁴⁴⁹ Their status as "curiosities" places these objects within an early nineteenth century European worldview, discussed further below. I propose that Robertson's gift was motivated by his desire to establish his own legacy in Perth, knowing that he would spend his final years in Canada.⁴⁵⁰

Included with Robertson's 1833 donation to the PLAS was the following letter addressed to the Society's Secretary, David Morrison:

It was my intention last year to have visited the place of my nativity, but from the unfortunate circumstance of an accident I met with when riding out debarred me of the pleasure I had anticipated in presenting personally a few curiosities collected on the shores of the Columbia and the surrounding countries about the Rocky Mountains. Presuming they may [be] an object of some attraction to my townspeople, augment the varieties of the Society, and point out to the Inquisitive members of that respectable Body that the Indians of that part of the

⁴⁴⁸ Andrea Laforet, "Objects and Knowledge: Early Accounts from Ethnographers, and Their Written Records and Collecting Practices, ca. 1880-1930," in *Native Art of the Northwest Coast*, 135.

⁴⁴⁹ Thomas, *Entangled Objects*, 151.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 126.

world, tho far behind in the arts of civilised life, have some claims to notice on the score of ingenuity.⁴⁵¹

This passage may be better understood in light of Robertson's biography. Robertson, the son of a Perth family of weavers, left Scotland as a young man to pursue a number of occupations in England and North America, where he spent most of his adult career in the Hudson's Bay territories as a fur trader. In Canada, Robertson married Theresa Chalifoux, a Métis woman with whom he had several children.⁴⁵² An enterprising man, Robertson is mainly remembered for his role in initiating the events that led to the unification of the North West Company (his employer from 1803-1809) with the HBC in 1821. He led a life of travel and died in 1842 at the age of 59 at his home in Montréal.

HBC governor George Simpson, a common link between Yale and Robertson, described both men in his Character Book. Simpson praised Robertson in the early days of the latter's HBC service, describing him as a man of high standing and open mind, a "pleasant Gentlemanly Fellow [who had] none of those narrow constricted illiberal ideas which so much characterises the Gentry of Rupert's Land" (1822).⁴⁵³ Following the merger of the two companies however Simpson's attitude towards

⁴⁵¹ Colin Robertson to David Morrison, 19 November 1833. Archive 79, Perth Museum and Art Gallery.

⁴⁵² "Métis" refers to a person of mixed Indigenous and Euro-Canadian ancestry.

⁴⁵³ George Woodcock, "Robertson, Colin," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Volume VII, accessed 17 January 2014, <http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio.php?BioId=37757>.

Robertson soured and Simpson proceeded to frame him as a conceited man who had “[become] Sentimental and fancied himself the hero of every tale of Romance that passed through his hands.”⁴⁵⁴ Likewise, in her journal, Simpson’s wife Frances wrote that Robertson considered himself the “Chesterfield of Rupert’s Land, and therefore surpassing all others in elegant manners, and polite conversation.” Characterizing him as a pretentious and dilettante name dropper, Frances Simpson wrote that as Chief Factor of York Factory, Robertson “took a wonderful fancy for beauing [her] round the Fort...[while] he talked of every one of any celebrity, whose names he was acquainted with, as his particular friends, although he frequently blundered the names...He thus by affecting the polished, fine & polite gentleman rendered himself quite ridiculous, and a perfect annoyance.”⁴⁵⁵

Robertson seems to have pursued cultural capital through the collection of objects and knowledge to increase his social status and prestige. As Thomas argues with the late-eighteenth century Pacific exploratory collections of Cook and Banks, “Indigenous artifacts virtually became trophies which reflected the broader experience and mastery of a passage around the world on the part of a traveller.”⁴⁵⁶ Robertson’s

⁴⁵⁴ Woodcock, “Robertson, Colin.”

⁴⁵⁵ Frances Simpson, “Journal,” York Factory, 25 August 1830, in *The Beaver Magazine*, Outfit 285 (Summer 1954), 12-18.

⁴⁵⁶ Thomas, *Entangled Objects*, 143.

lack of experience on the Northwest Coast however, and the fact that he did not identify Yale as the collector of the Salish objects is equally illuminating because it suggests that Robertson intended to convey the impression that he had traveled to and experienced the cultures of the Northwest Coast himself.

Still, other descriptions of Robertson are more generous. Biographer George Woodcock frames him as “a braggart, but an audacious one: his favourite maxim was ‘when you are among wolves, howl!’” “‘Glittering Pomposity,’” Robertson wrote, “‘has an amazing effect on Freeman, Metiss [sic] and Indians.’” Though Simpson judged Robertson to be a “‘frothy trifling conceited man,’” Woodcock, writing from a position of considerable distance and hindsight, points out that Robertson’s campaigns in the breakdown of the North West Company as an independent organization show him to have been a shrewd strategist and an opportunistic businessman.⁴⁵⁷ Robertson strove to cultivate a respectable reputation on both sides of the Atlantic, a tricky move at places like the Red River settlement, where the racial prejudices of high-status élites like Simpson threatened the acceptance of Robertson’s Métis wife into “what passed for society in that little settlement.”⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁷ Woodcock, “Robertson.”

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

4.3.1 *Objects and documentation*

Portraits of Robertson as a lover of the arts and a self-promoter may explain why his collection remained for many years attributed only to him despite its more complicated background. Robertson wrote Yale as early as 1824, asking him to collect curiosities on his behalf. Yale's identity as collector, overlooked for a century and a half after his list was copied by one of the Museum's officers into the Antiquarian Society's letterbook was rediscovered by NMS curator Dale Idiens when she formally catalogued the Perth collections in the early 1980s. Idiens compiled a catalogue after temporary museum staff accessioned the Perth Museum's ethnographic collections through 1977-79.⁴⁵⁹ The formal accessioning and cataloguing process raised the profile of PMAG's ethnographic collections and Idiens' article on the Museum's Salish pieces for *American Indian Art Magazine* introduced Robertson's collection to a wider audience, influencing subsequent research papers and publications on Salish art and material culture in which these objects play a central role.⁴⁶⁰ As I noted in Chapter 2, Robertson's is now known as one of the earliest museum collections containing argillite carvings in Britain.⁴⁶¹

⁴⁵⁹ James A. Blair, "Forward," in Idiens, *Catalogue of the Ethnographic Collection*.

⁴⁶⁰ See for example, Idiens, "Northwest Coast Artifacts," 46-53; Leece, "Coast Salish Mountain Goat Horn Bracelets," 72-75; Brotherton, *S'abadeb* (2008).

⁴⁶¹ Macnair and Hoover, *The Magic Leaves* (1984), 33.

Of the over 1000 ethnographic objects in the PMAG, 78 travelled to Perth from the Northwest Coast. Of these, 21 catalogue entries are attributed to Colin Robertson's 1833 donation, which between the two original collection lists contained 55 object entries. As Idiens notes, many of the original objects did not survive after repeated moves by the PLAS and the 1914 transfer of its collections to the PMAG when the Society became defunct. Many of the pieces originally donated by Robertson can therefore no longer be traced, and further documentation problems exist: because the two lists are not detailed, it is difficult to associate extant objects in the Perth collection to the entries on the historical packing lists.⁴⁶²

Because the longer list is signed by Yale, we can assume he assembled this collection comprised of mostly Coast Salish objects: bracelets and combs with the circle, crescent and triangle elements characteristic of Coast Salish design,⁴⁶³ and sturgeon fishing and canoe models which he described in some ethnographic detail.⁴⁶⁴ As Idiens has pointed out, insufficient detail for several entries such as "hats," "baskets," and "pipes" prevent definitive provenance. Yale, who had access to Coast

⁴⁶² Idiens, "Northwest Coast Artifacts," 46-47.

⁴⁶³ Brotherton, *S'abadeb*, 79.

⁴⁶⁴ The bracelets, though unattributed as to collector in the *Catalogue*, are assumed to be part of the Yale/Robertson collection, and have been given the PMAG accession numbers 1978.489 1-7. The combs are numbered 1978.484-488; the fishing and canoe models are 1978.517, 1978.465, 1978.502 1-2, 1978.503.

Salish societies, was in a good position to collect these things for Robertson.

Furthermore, his extended description of a model Salish canoe outfitted with the implements for sturgeon fishing on the Fraser River shows him to have been a keen observer with an aptitude for ethnographic-like description. Contrary to Simpson's prediction of Yale's limited career prospects (a judgment that was probably class-based as much as based on Yale's lack of education), Yale did rise in the ranks of the HBC and eventually retired comfortably on Vancouver Island like many other former fur traders.⁴⁶⁵

The second list sent with Robertson's collection corresponds to a second box of objects and is written in a different hand from both Robertson's letter and Yale's packing list. Robertson's letter presenting his donation suggests that the second box, consisting of both ethnographic and natural history objects may have been organized around the Fort Vancouver area. As Robertson noted, his collection consisted of "a few curiosities collected on the shores of the Columbia." Fort Vancouver, the depot (headquarters) of the HBC's Columbia Department was located on the north bank of the Columbia River.⁴⁶⁶ Among the ethnographic works on Robertson's second list are

⁴⁶⁵ Simpson's comments are quoted in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

⁴⁶⁶ Walter N. Sage, "The Place of Fort Vancouver in the History of the Northwest" *The Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 39 (2) April 1948), 89.

a Chilcat apron and Salish cloak,⁴⁶⁷ two hats, one of which was made of spruce root; a woven basket; a bow with arrows; “2 Indian tobacco pipes;” and some material “with which the natives make their nets and other Fishing implements.” The natural history items in this collection included two stuffed moles; “a species of Fox;” the skin of an “American panther;” and seeds of the “bois de Senteur [?]” and the “large Willamette pine.”⁴⁶⁸ The Willamette valley in present-day Oregon is located about sixty miles south of the historic location of Fort Vancouver. To be sure, the non-descript “pipes” entries on both lists permit only speculation as to which pipes belong to which list. Still, given that Robertson’s second list contains a northern piece – the Chilcat blanket – and the seed of the Willamette Pine, it is possible that the two Haida ceremonial argillite pipes also belonged to this second list, and that these objects were acquired in the Fort Vancouver area, though there is no evidence to show how Robertson acquired them (Figures 16 and 17).

⁴⁶⁷ PMAG 1978.479; PMAG 1978.522.

⁴⁶⁸ Colin Robertson collection, “2nd Box.” Archive 79. Perth Museum and Art Gallery.



Figure 16. Argillite ceremonial pipe
 Perth Museum and Art Gallery
 Collection of Colin Robertson (1833)
 1978.468
 14 cm x 5.5 cm
 Image © Perth & Kinross Council



Figure 17. Argillite ceremonial pipe
 Perth Museum and Art Gallery
 Collection of Colin Robertson (1833)
 1978.471
 18.5 cm x 7 cm
 Photo by Kaitlin McCormick, courtesy Perth & Kinross Council

It is difficult to trace collections of First Nations material culture through the HBC archive in light of the vast volume of records and because references to an individual's collecting actually may not exist. As Kopytoff has pointed out, select aspects of the life histories of objects, like those of people, get preserved while others are discarded. "Biographies of things," Kopytoff writes, "cannot be but similarly partial."⁴⁶⁹ As I noted in Chapter 3, archaeological and historical evidence (i.e. the Wilkes collection) show that Fort Vancouver was a site where argillite carvings were available. The two pipes listed in the Yale collection – also without description – likely refer to two remaining pipes, one that resembles a weasel with Salish crescent and triangle designs similar to the goat-horn bracelets noted earlier,⁴⁷⁰ and another pipe apparently made from steatite (Figures 18 and 19).⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁹ Kopytoff, "The cultural biography of things," in *The Social Life of Things*, 68.

⁴⁷⁰ Brotherton, *S'abadeb*, 85.

⁴⁷¹ The Perth Museum catalogue numbers for these objects are, respectively, 1978.1761 and 1978.469.



Figure 18. Steatite pipe

Perth Museum and Art Gallery

Collection of Colin Robertson (1833)

1978.469

7.5 cm x 7 cm

Photo by Kaitlin McCormick, courtesy Perth & Kinross Council



Figure 19. Salish-style stone pipe

Perth Museum and Art Gallery

Collection of Colin Robertson (1833)

1978.1761

Photo by Kaitlin McCormick, courtesy Perth & Kinross Council

Though not made of argillite, Macnair and Hoover suggest the steatite pipe (Figure 19) could be stylistically Haida, while Wright believes it may be attributed to a Bella Bella carver.⁴⁷² Including the Robertson collection among the earliest Haida argillite collections to reach the world's museums, Macnair and Hoover write that the pipes pictured in Figures 16 and 17 are "stylistically early and unquestionably made of argillite."⁴⁷³

⁴⁷² Robin K. Wright, "Nineteenth Century Haida Argillite Pipe Carvers: Stylistic Attributions" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1985), 138-142.

⁴⁷³ Macnair and Hoover, *The Magic Leaves*, (2002), 21. A fifth argillite pipe in the collections of the Perth Museum was attributed to Robertson's collection by Drew and Wilson in their book, *Argillite, Art of the Haida*. There, the authors assert that pipe 1978.472 (Drew and Wilson, 152), demonstrates "an instance of early use of abalone shell for inlays," and is "one of five pipes which Colin Robertson gave to Perth in 1833." Macnair and Hoover, *The Magic Leaves* (2002), 21, argue that this pipe is stylistically later, and that it is therefore unlikely that this was one of the four pipes listed on Robertson's two donation lists. Art historian Robin K. Wright disagrees with Macnair and Hoover's stylistic analysis. Wright has argued that this pipe could indeed be an early example of argillite carving despite its unusual use of abalone inlay. In her analysis of the Robertson collection, Wright acknowledges that although pipe 1978.472 "is rather crude in style," it is still chronologically early: "it is thick in cross section, has a large bowl and, though crude, falls within the expected range of early argillite pipe styles. It is inlaid with abalone which is an unusual feature." Wright does not exclude the possibility of this pipe having been made before 1835 because she has found two other pre-1835 Haida motif pipes inlaid with abalone shell. Wright notes that all five pipes associated with Robertson's collection have been smoked based on the appearance of carbon residue on their inside surfaces, and concludes that "there may be no way to determine which four are the original pipes." Wright, "Nineteenth Century Haida Argillite Pipe Carvers," 138-142.

4.3.2 *Purpose of Robertson's donation*

Why did Robertson collect and donate these objects from the Northwest Coast, a place with which he had no direct experience? If his contemporaries' portraits are accurate, it would appear that Robertson affected a gentlemanly status, cultivated an expertise in arts and literature, and, according to Frances Simpson, associated himself with leading literary figures of his day such as the Irish poet Thomas Moore and the American author Washington Irving.⁴⁷⁴ His donation letter suggests a number of dynamics at play. Regretful at being denied the pleasure of presenting his curiosities personally implies Robertson's donation was partially intended to garner recognition as an equal among members of the Perth learned society, a point highlighted earlier with reference to the status-oriented collections of late-enlightenment British élites. Joseph Banks's collection of Pacific artefacts for example, "performed the more particular operation of standing for a voyage and the work of science." It seems that Robertson intended for his collection to impress his knowledge of Indigenous societies inhabiting Canadian hinterlands, accessed through trade and travel. As Thomas writes, the intended effects of such collections were "a matter of prestige and social status."⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷⁴ Simpson, "Journal," in *The Beaver Magazine*, 12-18.

⁴⁷⁵ Thomas, *Entangled Objects*, 143.

Secondly, the language with which Robertson presented his donation (the objects were “curiosities”) echoes enlightenment attitudes towards the objects and lifestyles of Indigenous others.⁴⁷⁶ Eighteenth century “curiosity” marked a tension between “scientifically controlled interest in further knowledge and an unstable ‘curiosity’ which [was] not authorized by any methodological or theoretical discourse.”⁴⁷⁷ Describing Indigenous people as “far behind in the arts of civilised life” but having “some claims to notice on the score of ingenuity,” Robertson’s remarks recall the ambivalence of late-eighteenth century British and French observers’ evaluations of Indigenous peoples. As Thomas points out, “observations of barbaric practices conflicted with the acknowledgement that there were elements of civilization,” and pejorative assumptions about the qualities of particular peoples were often “offset” by positive remarks.⁴⁷⁸ Robertson’s letter alludes to the tensions that Thomas outlines regarding Europeans’ perceptions of the civilization and/or savagery of Indigenous peoples.

⁴⁷⁶ On European ideas of “curiosity,” see Thomas, *Entangled Objects*, 126-151; Phillips, *Trading Identities*, 4-9; Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991; Krzysztof Pomian, *Collectors and Curiosities: Paris and Venice, 1500-1800* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990).

⁴⁷⁷ Thomas, *Entangled Objects*, 127.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 129.

Finally, there was a knowledge-based purpose to the collections of this era because in general, explorers “took artifacts to express something about the people who collectively produced them; they did not attach much importance to the singular histories of particular articles.”⁴⁷⁹ Though Robertson was not an explorer as such, and was two generations removed from the voyages of the late eighteenth century, his collection demonstrates some literary and objective similarities to the exploratory collections Thomas describes. The lack of detail associated with the descriptions of the objects (with the exception of Yale’s model sturgeon fishing boat description) is one example. Robertson’s donation to the PLAS can therefore be described as an early post-enlightenment curiosity collection.

In Chapter 2, I commented on the social atmosphere of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Perthshire, which helps to put this collection into a local social context. To recap, the PLAS emerged from a developing culture of educated middle and upper-class Perthshire citizens and allowed its members “the opportunity to combine patriotism, sociability and the cultivation of learned interests.”⁴⁸⁰ As Pratt has shown, the field of ethnography was still in its infancy in the 1840s and “most collections of Indigenous artefacts were based on the older model of cabinet of

⁴⁷⁹ Thomas, *Entangled Objects*, 151.

⁴⁸⁰ Allan, “Scottish Enlightenment,” 5.

curiosity.”⁴⁸¹ Robertson’s collection and the donations to the PLAS from his Perthshire contemporaries in other far-flung parts of the world were presented using the language of curiosity and sometimes with ethnographic-like descriptions. They also demonstrated the donors’ engagement in international knowledge networks and the exchange of ideas characteristic of British Enlightenment cultures of collection.⁴⁸²

In 1833, apparently ailing from a stroke from which he never fully recovered, Robertson sent the two boxes of Northwest Coast artifacts to his native Perth. “Mad,” and “confined to a Sick Room and unable to render himself the least assistance, [but still speaking] as largely as ever,” Simpson wrote spitefully of Robertson, who had that year “ordered his family down to Canada and the whole host of his Miserable Relations from Scotland to settle around him on his wonderfully improved and immensely valuable property.”⁴⁸³ It was there, in his home in Montréal, the “ginger bread place of Gibraltar [cottage],” that Robertson reflected on the value of these objects, by then far removed from the Fraser River, the “shores of the Columbia,” and the northern Northwest Coast where they were made and used.

⁴⁸¹ Pratt, “Objects, Performance and Ethnographic Spectacle,” 103.

⁴⁸² Amira Henare, *Museums, Anthropology and Imperial Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 210; Allan, “Scottish Enlightenment,” 5.

⁴⁸³ Simpson to McTavish, 4 May 1833. B.135/c/2. From “Colin Robertson” search file, HBCA.

The same year he made his donation, Robertson arranged for his portrait to be shipped from Perth to Montréal, which may have been another strategy to preserve his memory on both sides of the Atlantic.⁴⁸⁴ The “final term” of the collection, as Baudrillard observed, “must always be the person of the collector.”⁴⁸⁵ As noted earlier, Robertson’s collection was crystallized as such upon its entry into the PLAS ledgerbook. Having arranged for his portrait to be shipped to Perth it seems he also desired that his gift secure his immortal memory, which “the act of collecting so often embodies.”⁴⁸⁶ Given Yale’s hand in the collecting process would only be ascertained a century and a half later, it seems that Robertson succeeded.

4.4 *The William Mitchell collection, UAM*

Of the four collections this thesis investigates, the most enigmatic may be the group of argillite pipes collected by the HBC ship captain William Mitchell of Aberdeen. Unlike Robertson, Hector and Rae, Mitchell is not known to have been a member of any scientific or antiquarian societies, and though his name features in several historical accounts of early colonial British Columbia, he was described as a poor record keeper

⁴⁸⁴ William Smith to Robertson (C/o George Moffatt, Montréal), 23 March 1833. HBCA A.5/10, 93.

From “Colin Robertson” search file, HBCA.

⁴⁸⁵ Baudrillard, “The System of Collecting,” in *The Cultures of Collecting*, 12.

⁴⁸⁶ Forrester, “‘Mille e tre’: Freud and Collecting,” in *The Cultures of Collecting*, 249.

despite his professional status in the Company.⁴⁸⁷ Still, Mitchell's argillite collection at the UAM has generated considerable interest among students of Haida art history.

Drew and Wilson published seven of Mitchell's ship panel pipes in *Argillite, Art of the Haida* (1980). Wright also discusses them in her MA and PhD theses (1977, 1985), referring to the *Beaver* pipe as a portrait of the real HBC steamship and prototype for subsequent such carvings.⁴⁸⁸ The few details that exist of Mitchell's life, presented here, have been gleaned from a range of sources. His contemporaries portrayed him as a hearty, good-natured man, and a storyteller who "spun salty yarns on [Victoria] street corners, and was welcomed into every house in [that] place."⁴⁸⁹ As captain of the *Una* and *Recovery*, the ships involved in the HBC's short-lived gold rush on the west coast of Moresby Island, Mitchell had considerable contact with Haida people on their own lands, contact that probably continued throughout his career as a trader and sailor with the HBC.

The circumstances surrounding the Museum's acquisition of the Mitchell collection are unknown. This could be because the donation possibly predates the

⁴⁸⁷ I did not find any records by Mitchell's own hand at the HBCA or BCPA.

⁴⁸⁸ These pipes are: ABDUA:5555 (p. 163); ABDUA:5557 (p. 182), ABDUA:5558 (p. 181); ABDUA:5559 (p. 179); ABDUA:5560 (p. 181); ABDUA:5561 (p. 178); ABDUA:5563 (p. 182). Drew and Wilson, *Argillite, Art of the Haida*.

⁴⁸⁹ James K. Nesbitt, "Salty, old sailor ('Willie' Mitchell), and lovable nurse," *Victoria Times Colonist*, 4 April, 1965, 55H.

records of the University's Senatus Academicus. The collection comprises 31 objects, including fifteen works of argillite, an ivory pipe-shaped carving, and several northern Northwest Coast objects including four masks, two carved and painted human figures, a model canoe and a Chilcat blanket. The collection's history is complicated by inconsistent catalogue documentation, as the museum's several catalogues reflect a long history of institutional restructuring and reorganizing of documentation systems.⁴⁹⁰ Former curator Charles Hunt wrote that the University acquired Mitchell's collection between 1850-1855. Neil Curtis, current Head of Museums, has suggested that the collection may have been bequeathed to the University of Aberdeen following Mitchell's death in Victoria in 1876.⁴⁹¹ Though the acquisition date is unknown, it is clear that the University acquired the collection before 1887. Objects in Mitchell's collection first appear in the 1887 catalogue of the Archaeological Museum of King's

⁴⁹⁰ See Helen Southwood, "the History and Wonder of Marischal Museum's Catalogues, 1900-2000," in *Journal of Museum Ethnography* (2003): 94-108; Neil Curtis, "A history of the University of Aberdeen and its museums," in "Public Engagement, Research and Training: The Shared Aims of the University of Aberdeen and its Museums," in *A Handbook for Academic Museums: Beyond Exhibitions and Education*. Museums etc., 62-86 eds. SS Jandl and MS Gold (Museums, Etc. 2012).

⁴⁹¹ Charles Hunt, "The Exotic Heritage," *The Deeside Field*, 17 (1981), 106. Hunt may have based his statement on Wright's dating of the argillite ship pipes to the 1850s. Neil Curtis, "North America in Aberdeen: the collections of Marischal Museum, University of Aberdeen," in *Material Histories: Proceedings of a workshop held at Marischal Museum, University of Aberdeen*, ed. Alison K. Brown, 26-27 April 2007, 69.

College, now referred to as the “Michie” catalogue by University of Aberdeen Museum staff.

The Michie catalogue attributes the ten “specimens of stone pipes made by the Indians of Queen Charlotte Island,” the two “stone plates from Queen Charlotte Island,” and the “pipe made of the tusk of the walrus by the Port Simpson Indians” to “Capt. Wm. Mitchell, Hon, Hud. Bay C.S.”⁴⁹² Since Mitchell was “Master” (i.e. Captain) of various ships from 1851-1859, it is possible he collected the works during this time, though his HBC employment record does not suggest that he traveled to the UK in the 1850s. In fact, catalogue discrepancies across the few available sources name Mitchell (in his various roles during HBC service) as collector of some, but not others, of the 31 objects now included in his collection.⁴⁹³

William Mitchell was born in 1802 in Aberdeen.⁴⁹⁴ According to his HBCA ‘biographical sheet’ Mitchell’s career with the Company began in 1836, when he worked as First Officer, Mate, First Mate, and eventually Master on several ships

⁴⁹² Charles Michie was the Conservator of the Museum. See Michie, “Prefatory Note,” in *Catalogue of Antiquities in the Archaeological Museum of King’s College, University of Aberdeen* (Aberdeen: Leslie & Ryssell, Printers, 1887), 16.

⁴⁹³ The catalogues in which Mitchell’s collection (partially) appears, are: Michie, *Catalogue of Antiquities* (1887); Nora Macdonald, *Catalogue of anthropological specimens removed from King’s College Abd. To Marischal College, Aberdeen, Anthropological Museum in 1908* [no date; last entry 1896?]; R.W. Reid, *Illustrated Catalogue of the Anthropological Museum, University of Aberdeen* (Aberdeen: The University Press, 1912).

⁴⁹⁴ John T. Walbran, *British Columbia Coast Names* (Geographic Board of Canada, 1909), 340.

including the *Sumatra*, *Vancouver*, *Cadboro*, *Beaver*, *Columbia*, *Una* and the *Recovery*.⁴⁹⁵ His HBC career lasted over 25 years and ended with his brief command of Fort Rupert (Map 5) before he retired circa 1862.⁴⁹⁶ Mitchell died at the age of 74 in a Victoria boarding house owned and operated by the wife of his former colleague and friend, Henry Bailey Ella. Ella's wife, Martha Cheney Ella, was one of the first settlers on Vancouver Island, and several of her diary entries record her husband's and Mitchell's many journeys to and from Hawaii, where the HBC had a post at Honolulu (1834-1860).⁴⁹⁷

A search for a will or probate record at the BCPA in July 2012 produced no results. Nor did any such records appear in archivists' searches at the National Archives of Scotland or the HBCA. A document of Mitchell's expenses in the months leading up to his death show his purchases included just a few items of clothing, some brandy and wine, and the wages paid to his nurse at the Victoria boarding house where he died in January 1876.⁴⁹⁸ Mitchell was remembered in a brief obituary in the *British Colonist*: "no one was more popular in this community, both with young and old, than the

⁴⁹⁵ HBCA biographical sheets provide basic information on HBC employees.

⁴⁹⁶ "Mitchell, William." Biographical Sheet, HBCA, accessed 29 July 2015, https://www.gov.mb.ca/chc/archives/hbca/biographical/m/mitchell_william.pdf.

⁴⁹⁷ Mrs. Martha Beeton (Cheney) Ella Diary, Part 2. E/B/E15, BCPA.

⁴⁹⁸ "Mr. William Mitchell, Bought of The Hudson's Bay Company Western Department Outfit 1875. Victoria, V.I. May 1877;" "Statement of Cash Advances by the HBCo. o/a Mr. Wm. Mitchell, Outfit 1875." A11/89, HBCA.

deceased gentleman, who had always a kind word for everybody, and very many indeed will for a long time miss his familiar form and his cheery greeting in the streets.”⁴⁹⁹

Mitchell’s fine collection of argillite ship pipes stands out in the life story of this man of few biographical details or possessions.

Universally favourably portrayed, Mitchell’s biography, like his collection, is marked by inconsistencies and contradictions. Though his obituary states he was employed “successively [as] master of the vessels Vancouver, Cadborough, Recovery, Una and Beaver,”⁵⁰⁰ his HBC details show he was Master of only the *Una* (1851-52) and the *Recovery* (1852-59). According to his biographical sheet, Mitchell served as First Officer and Mate on the *Vancouver* (1838-1841), as Mate on the *Cadboro* (1841-42), as First Mate on the *Beaver* (1842-43), as First Mate again on the *Cadboro* (1843-44), and as First Mate on the *Columbia* (1844-50), before becoming Master Mariner in 1851.⁵⁰¹ These discrepancies, and the dearth of personal records, limit the degree to which Mitchell and his collection may be solidly documented. This thesis assumes that the body of objects attributed to Mitchell in the Michie catalogue form the core of his original collection.

⁴⁹⁹ “Death of Captain W. Mitchell,” *The British Colonist*, 14 January 1876, accessed 23 September 2015, <http://archive.org/stream/dailycolonist18760114uvic/18760114#page/n2/mode/1up>

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁰¹ “Mitchell, William.” Biographical Sheet, HBCA.

The following anecdote suggests Mitchell was Captain of the *Beaver* during Douglas's Governorship of Vancouver Island (1858-1864), though his HBCA record indicates he was at that time Captain of the *Recovery* (1852-1859).

'Governor Douglas, on one occasion, was much vexed with Mitchell, because of his dilatoriness in handling the *Beaver's* accounts. After several unsuccessful applications, the governor went down to the boat in person. 'Capt. Mitchell, he began, 'you must hand in your accounts by tomorrow noon.' My accounts?' replied Billy. 'I have none.' 'Surely, Capt. Mitchell,' returned the governor, 'you kept accounts of your expenditures and receipts.' 'Yes, sir, I did.' 'Well, where are they?' 'To tell the truth, Governor, I kept them in the Bible, and the damned rats have eaten the book from Genesis to Revelations.'⁵⁰²

Another anecdote illustrates Mitchell's relationship with this legendary ship, noting that he was "for some years" in charge of the *Beaver*. If the HBC records are correct, then the following account exaggerates the length of Mitchell's career on this ship. Here, Edgar Fawcett remembers visiting the *Beaver* circa 1874, shortly before the steamer was sold to the private freight company Dickson, Campbell & Co.:

On board we met the venerable Captain William Mitchell, who has had charge of the vessel for some years. He was busily engaged in packing his clothes into chests preparatory to going ashore. He remembers well the *Beaver* in her early days. Every room, every plank possesses historic interest to him. He pointed out the Captain's room. 'Just the same,' said he, 'as when I first saw it in [1836]. There's the chest of drawers, there's the bunk, and there's the hook where the Captain's pipe hung, and many's the smoke I've had in these cabins nearly forty years ago. Nothing below has been changed,' continued Captain Mitchell, 'except – except the faces that used to people these rooms in the days long ago, and' – pointing to his thin, gray locks – 'I was a good deal younger then!' He led

⁵⁰² Nesbitt, "Salty, old sailor," 55H.

the way into the engine-room, chatting pleasantly as he went and relating incidents connected with the *Beaver* and her dead people of an interesting character which we may some day give to the world.⁵⁰³

This nostalgic passage, published some 35 years after Mitchell's death, gives some insight into a modern settler-Canadian's desire to preserve and promote the collected stories of the fur trade era, a commemorative act implied by the title of the book in which this passage appears, *Some Reminiscences of Old Victoria*. As Elsner and Cardinal have observed, collections (including collections of stories) "gesture to nostalgia for previous worlds (worlds whose imagined existence took place prior to their contents being collected), and also to amusement."⁵⁰⁴ Fawcett's reminiscence of Mitchell (the *Beaver* "and her dead people") is doubly nostalgic since within it, Mitchell himself fondly recollected his fur trade days. As the *Beaver* was being refitted for the last time ahead of its final transformation into private commercial vessel, we might understand this passage as projecting a colonial past into a Canadian "present-becoming-future," a process described by Clifford in which the products of nostalgia are made.⁵⁰⁵ Prefacing my analysis of Mitchell's argillite pipes, the following discussion charts how the steamship *Beaver* can be seen to represent colonial nostalgia and power.

⁵⁰³ Edgar Fawcett, *Some Reminiscences of Old Victoria* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1912), 199-202.

⁵⁰⁴ Elsner and Cardinal, "Introduction," in *The Cultures of Collecting*, 5.

⁵⁰⁵ Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 244.

4.4.1 *The Beaver as colonial object*

Mitchell's reported recollections gloss over some important facts in the biography of this ship. The nostalgia with which he and Fawcett remembered the *Beaver* mirrors the way it has been memorialized in conventional Canadian history. As historian Wally K. Lamb observed, in its earlier days, the *Beaver* was a key player in the HBC's takeover of the Northwest Coast. In 1840, James Douglas traveled on it to Sitka to negotiate the HBC's trade takeover of the Alaska Panhandle from the Russians; in 1843 Captain McNeill and Douglas traveled on it to explore the future site of Fort Victoria.⁵⁰⁶

Except for 1842, the year when Mitchell was its First Mate, and 1849 when it was idle awaiting new boilers, the *Beaver* was "almost continuously on the move, trading with Indians and carrying furs and supplies to or from the various establishments on the coast."⁵⁰⁷ The steamship would take a back seat to the northern Northwest Coast trade in 1853 with the arrival of the new steamer *Otter*, which took over the northern trade while the *Beaver* ferried freight and passengers between Fort Victoria, Nanaimo, and Forts Langley and Nisqually.⁵⁰⁸

The *Beaver* had an area on board designated for Indigenous traders, whose numbers on deck were limited. According to the *Victoria Gazette*, the ship's decks

⁵⁰⁶ W. Kaye Lamb, "S.S. Beaver: Regal Yacht of 1858," *The Beaver Magazine* (Winter 1958) 11.

⁵⁰⁷ Lamb, "S.S. Beaver," 12.

⁵⁰⁸ Lamb, "S.S. Beaver," 13.

were “protected from invasion by a border netting of rope, so as to prevent the Indians from clambering up her sides, and never more than thirty [were] allowed to come on board at any time, unless accompanied by their wives and children.”⁵⁰⁹ The *Gazette*’s description of Indigenous traders, in contrast with that of the ship’s large crew who were remembered as “active, robust, weather-beaten, jolly, good-tempered men,” portrays the former collectively as a threatening other.⁵¹⁰

Lamb called the *Beaver* an “old pioneer,” and remembers it for the “scores of ways in which she contributed to the development of the Pacific province.”⁵¹¹ Indeed, the ship is remembered for the three distinct phases in its career, serving as fur trading ship (1836-1860), as passenger steamer and survey ship in the service of the Imperial Government (1860-1870), and finally as a tug and freight boat based at Victoria until running aground in 1888 at Vancouver.⁵¹² Largely remembered in a positive light as a pioneering vessel, we might also examine its more militaristic functions as an instrument of colonial power. Clifford’s use of the concept of “chronotope” may elucidate some of the *Beaver*’s colonial baggage, as I discuss further below.

⁵⁰⁹ [no author identified], “The Beaver,” *Victoria Gazette*, December 1859.

⁵¹⁰ Dr. J.S. Helmcken (c. 1850), quoted in Lamb, “S.S. Beaver,” 12.

⁵¹¹ Lamb, “S.S. Beaver,” 13, 17.

⁵¹² Sir Charles P. Piers, “Short History of S.S. Beaver,” Manuscript addressed to Douglas Mackay, Hudson’s Bay House, Winnipeg Manitoba, 1936. HBCA, 1.

As noted in Chapter 3, Harris has compared fur trade forts to the “borderland castles or walled towns in Europe,” in which the men who served within were subject to a strict hierarchical order. The *Beaver*, Harris points out, functioned also like a mobile fort, and the men who ran her abided by the same discipline.⁵¹³ The image that Harris describes is similar to the *Victoria Gazette*’s description of the *Beaver* in 1859, in which it was said to carry “30 men, 4 six-pounders [guns], and a large complement of small arms.” Upon its decks, “protected” by netting, the trading was “conducted under the direction of one of the HBCo’s ‘Chief Traders,’” and was “kept entirely separate from the sailing of the ship.”⁵¹⁴ As Harris points out, the *Beaver* itself was used as a tool in the HBC’s strategies of power and control in the management of Company men as well as for maintaining a front of power to Native traders, as the HBC did at Fort Simpson. However, though fort society was the most disciplined creation of the western fur trade, the officers did not see everything, and what they did see “rarely figured in the journals and letters that are the principal records of these places.”⁵¹⁵ The power of HBC traders was furthermore greatly diminished in Indigenous-controlled

⁵¹³ Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia*, 39.

⁵¹⁴ “The Beaver,” *Victoria Gazette*, December 1859.

⁵¹⁵ Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia*, 42-47.

territories, such as on the west coast of Moresby Island where the Haidas drove off Mitchell and the HBC gold miners in the early 1850s.⁵¹⁶

Prior to the colonial period the HBC did not lay claim to spaces beyond the forts; lacking the “machinery” of surveillance, the Company’s power over Indigenous people was restricted to inside the fort structures and to some extent in the spaces outside of them. Still, as episodes like the *Beaver*’s bombardment of the Native camp at Fort Simpson attest (described in Chapter 3), “quick, violent retribution would follow any attack on the personnel or property of the fur trade,” sometimes resulting in a “public, spectacle of power intended to impress and dissuade within a pervasive theatre of power in which Natives, like company servants, were audiences and actors.”⁵¹⁷ In addition to displays of power through the use of arms, literacy was also used “as an instrument of control, especially when combined with the extended spatial system of the fur trade and juxtaposed to local, oral cultures.”⁵¹⁸ According to Harris, experienced traders used both violent and non-violent strategies to protect and promote their interests, thereby consolidating their position on the Northwest Coast, “a crucial proto-colonial phase of European influence.”⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁶ This account is described in Walbran, *British Columbia Coast Names*, 176-177.

⁵¹⁷ Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia*, 48-49.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁵¹⁹ Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia*, 49.

The *Beaver* steamship thus symbolizes the transformation of the physical geography of the coast in its roles from (if necessary punitive) fur trader to surveyor, to colonial ferry service. It is remembered as a legendary and pioneering character, which changed the face of the fur trade, but also helped transform the former fur trading territories into mapped colonial territory. As I showed earlier, it has also been remembered with a powerful sense of nostalgia and for this reason that I suggest that Mitchell's ship pipe collection, especially the *Beaver* pipe, may be understood as a powerful souvenir, in Stewart's terms, "an object arising out of the necessarily insatiable demands of nostalgia."⁵²⁰ I continue this discussion, and that of the *Beaver* as chronotope, in the conclusion to this section, but first a discussion of Mitchell's ship pipes considers the "view from the shore."

4.4.2 Mitchell's argillite ship pipes: the view from the shore⁵²¹

Though Mitchell's collection includes ten fascinating argillite ship pipes, the *Beaver* carving, with its biographical baggage (for both carver and collector) is the focus of this discussion (see Figure 2). This *Beaver* portrait is a keen rendering of the historical ship, its parts and the roles of its crew. Made primarily of argillite, the piece also includes

⁵²⁰ Susan Stewart, *On Longing* (1984:135), quoted in Schor, "Collecting Paris," in *Unpacking Culture*, 255.

⁵²¹ As Jacknis points out, "the 'view from the ship' ... must be countered by the Aboriginal 'view from the shore.'" "From Explorers to Ethnographers," in *Native Art of the Northwest Coast*, 90 (f.n. 1).

glass, paper and whalesbone, which frames the windows of the two cabins and lines the hull of the ship. Glass panes have been inserted into the windows on the back cabin.

The whalesbone paddle wheel turns on a pin – showing that the artist observed how the *Beaver*'s paddle wheel turned in the water. Although Simpson claimed “the steamer’s mysterious and rapid movements speedily completed [Native traders’] subjugation,” Northwest Coast traders doubtlessly understood how the ship was fuelled, since the job of “wooding” the steamer was given to Indigenous labourers.⁵²²



Figure 20. Detail of argillite *Beaver* pipe
University of Aberdeen Museums
ABDUA 5559
Image © University of Aberdeen Museums

Near the stern of the ship pipe, standing between the paddle wheel and the whalesbone-framed cabin, a headless figure wears a coat, trousers and boots, the former detailed

⁵²² Simpson, *Narrative of a Journey*, 194; Somerset Mackie, *Trading Beyond the Mountains*, 137.

with collar, pockets and creases, and the latter with heels (Figure 20). This figure, probably representing an HBC officer, writes in a tablet-shaped ledger, the “text” incised in four individual columns of coiled lines. Writing was an essential practise in the fur trade for recording the exchange of goods and for official and personal communication. Northwest Coast people were known to be very careful about transporting letters – showing they recognized the importance of correspondence in the exchange of knowledge between forts.⁵²³ According to Harris, “letters [carried by Indigenous traders] usually got through [to the recipient], sometimes remarkably quickly, a reflection, according to one trader, of the Natives’ superstitious veneration of literacy.”⁵²⁴ Though we know nothing of this artist’s level of literacy, he must have observed the ship’s crew writing in logbooks or recording the lists of goods exchanged, since the HBC’s daily work involved the movement of goods and people and the routine documentation of these exchanges.

A second figure standing over the paddlewheel appears to be holding a bottle (see Figure 2). Drinking among Company traders and sailors was an ongoing problem

⁵²³ James Douglas wrote in 1852 that the Express canoe from Victoria to Nisqually cost an average of £6.10 per trip. “It is always conveyed by Indians,” Douglas wrote. “If white men are employed the cost would be much greater, there can be no cause however for employing the latter in preference to Indians; who are remarkably careful about letters; and expeditious in their journeys.” Douglas to Barclay, 12 May 1852. B.226/b/6, HBCA.

⁵²⁴ Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia*, 39.

and the overindulgence in “grog” and other spirits is documented throughout the ship’s journals, reports and correspondence.



Figure 21. Detail of argillite *Beaver* pipe
University of Aberdeen Museums
ABDUA 5559
Image © University of Aberdeen Museums

Another compelling detail is the cabin at the prow of the ship in which a tiny wooden figure of a man, carved and painted, wears a peacoat with his hands in his pockets and stands detached from the body of the ship. He stares out from the cabin window and behind him, glued onto the inside wall of the cabin, is a piece of paper, a printed extract from the “Poppies” section of the poem “Songs and Chorus of the Flowers” (1836) by the Victorian poet James Henry Leigh Hunt (1784-1859). The poem alludes to opium

use, and would have been published in one of the British papers or magazines available to the HBC servants in the country. It is unclear who pasted the text into the cabin.

Wright suggests that the figure inside the cabin might represent Captain Mitchell, who worked as First Mate on the *Beaver* from 1842-1843.⁵²⁵ It is also possible that the figure represents Captain William McNeill, whose career as Master and Chief Trader upon the *Beaver* spanned 1837-1842,⁵²⁶ and whose image was recorded on a totem pole carved by the Kwakwaka'wakw artist Johnny Moon.⁵²⁷ Wright argues that the extent to which buyers of argillite influenced the content of a carving is impossible to know, though it is conceivable that they requested specific designs, such as the carvings of individual ship pipes like the *Beaver*.⁵²⁸ Perhaps the poem fragment, published in 1836,

⁵²⁵ Wright, "Nineteenth Century Haida Argillite Pipe Carvers," 385-388 and 385-388; "William Mitchell." Biographical Sheet, HBCA.

⁵²⁶ Ibid.

⁵²⁷ The HBCA has a photograph of this pole upon which a hand-written note identifies "Johnny Moon's pole at H'Kusam (Salmon River) with Matha Hill [McNeill] below bird – Capt. WH McNeill of the Beaver Ma-ta-hall. Kwakiutl [Kwakwaka'wakw] – whale house front. Capt. McNeill is represented on this totem pole. The representation "Ma-ta-hell" is in Simpson's *Journey Round the World*. Vol. I." HBCA Beaver file accession # 2000/24. In his *Narrative of a Journey* Simpson remarks that the Kwakwaka'wakw traders with whom the HBC dealt on Vancouver Island understood "the precise length to which they might go in teasing Captain McNeill. They made sad work, by the by, of his name; for, whenever his head showed itself above the bulwarks, young and old, male and female, vociferated, from every canoe, Ma-ta-hell, Ma-ta-hell, Ma-ta-hell – a word which, with the comparative indistinctness of its first syllable, sounded very like a request on their part that their trader might go a great way beyond the engineer's furnace." Simpson, *Narrative of a Voyage*, 192-193.

⁵²⁸ Wright, "Haida Argillite Carved for Sale," 55.

was included in the cabin's interior to commemorate the year that both Mitchell and the *Beaver* arrived on the coast.

For Mitchell, this piece likely commemorated the ship and his years of service and adventure with the HBC; it may also allude to the opium trade, in which Britain supplied Indian opium to China.⁵²⁹ We can look at the *Beaver* as a representative of new technologies and Euro-Canadian governance and commerce. It contributed to the "expansion of Native wealth" as European goods flowed into First Nations communities, in turn stimulating elaborate potlatching and pole raising.⁵³⁰ The details represented on this pipe suggest it functioned as a portrait of the ship and its crew, but we may also see it today as a symbol of the times, documenting the introduction of a new and expanded economy and new technologies on the Coast. A remarkable record/portrait of the *Beaver* in its life as a trade ship, we might also see this carving as symbolic of the *Beaver*'s ambivalent tidings for Native people. As noted, the *Beaver* steamship contributed to the discipline, surveillance and mapping of what was transformed from formerly First Nations-controlled fur-trading territories to the

⁵²⁹ Great Britain exported opium from India to China in the 18th and 19th centuries. The British used the profits to buy Chinese luxuries, including porcelain pottery, tea and silk, goods that were in high demand in the West. "Opium trade," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed 19 February 2015, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/430160/opium-trade>. Interestingly, first Opium War (1839-42) coincided with the years McNeill was Captain of the *Beaver* steamer.

⁵³⁰ Williams, "Pipe," in Glass et al., *Objects of Exchange*, 155.

Canadian province of British Columbia. It therefore played a significant role in the reconstitution of the Northwest Coast as colonized place.

The *Beaver* steamship carving, with its symbols of literacy, commerce, consumption, and technology, is a statement of cultural difference, but also as an object of trade, it demonstrates this Haida artist's commentary on the changing world. Whether the piece is critical, satirical or humorous, what lends to its affective power and to the longstanding interest and attention it has received in the Aberdeen museum is that it represents a juncture in the lives of mid-nineteenth century Indigenous peoples. Before the pressures of religious missionization, re-education in western residential schools, displacement and the re-organization of lands, this piece shows the artist's critical awareness of the changing circumstances that the European figures represent. As a trade commodity it also speaks to the artists' engagement with the shifting conditions – new opportunities and new limitations – being brought to the coast by the modern western world.

4.4.3 *The collection as souvenir*

Mitchell's argillite pipe collection memorialized his experiences in the fur trade. As a souvenir, the *Beaver* pipe authenticated Mitchell's decades at sea, and may have

“served the primary function of remembering” his years of HBC service.⁵³¹ Mitchell’s reported recollections framed the early days of the HBC fur trade, in which the *Beaver* played such an important role, as his most authentic years. However, given the ship’s transformation, it is doubtful that “nothing [had] been changed” below decks over its four decades on the Northwest Coast. Stewart has remarked that the souvenir “speaks to a context of origins through a language of longing, for it is not an object arising out of need or use value: it is an object arising out of the necessarily insatiable demands of nostalgia.”⁵³² Mitchell’s *Beaver* pipe, representing the steamship prior to its transformation to survey and passenger ship, was for him an authentic and timeless expression of his experiences traveling up and down the Northwest Coast.⁵³³

For Mitchell, the link between this object and the historical ship is nostalgia. The modern Canadian recollections of the *Beaver* presented earlier, laden with pioneer and colonial rhetoric, suggest that this ship can be understood as “chronotype,” a rhetorical device used to situate something in space and time. Clifford borrowed this concept from Bakhtin (1937) to describe “a fictional setting where historically specific relations of power become visible and certain stories can ‘take place.’”⁵³⁴ Though the

⁵³¹ John Forrester, “Freud and Collecting,” in *The Cultures of Collecting*, 244.

⁵³² Susan Stewart, *On Longing* (1984:135), quoted in Schor, “Collecting Paris,” in *Unpacking Culture*, 255.

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 236.

Beaver was an existing ship that participated in real events, its stories of quelling Native resistance and meting out discipline among Indigenous traders on the Northwest Coast, to re-territorializing the north as British (and later Canadian) land, lent to its becoming a site of accumulated Canadian colonial mythology. While the argillite pipe has been wrapped by Mitchell's biography and also by colonial mythology, we can also try and look at it from the "view from the shore," and see its features in terms of the artist's critical reflections on the "relative merits of foreign power," but also of the ambivalent tidings of colonialism and the encroachment of modernity on the Northwest Coast.⁵³⁵

4.5 *The James Hector collection, NMS*

For the young Edinburgh medical graduate James Hector, the First Nations objects he brought back to Britain following his travels with the Palliser Expedition seem to have functioned neither as souvenir nor curiosity. As both Kaeppler (1978) and King (1981) have pointed out, "artificial curiosities" (what would later be called ethnographic specimens) "were not considered particularly valuable" in the late eighteenth century compared to the natural history collections that emerged from British exploratory

⁵³⁵ Glass, *Objects of Exchange*, 5.

expeditions.⁵³⁶ As I showed with Robertson's collection, motivations to collect ethnographic specimens in the late eighteenth century (and into the early nineteenth) supported educational and commercial objectives. Few scientific professionals who collected specimens prior to the establishment of the discipline of anthropology were interested in material culture, and ethnographic objects were deposited and displayed in museums "to show the different arts and crafts of mankind."⁵³⁷ By the mid-nineteenth century however, "[ethnographic collecting] was developing into a more serious interest, but then largely as an adjunct of archaeology in an attempt to illustrate the previous stages in man's evolution."⁵³⁸ A few notes on the intellectual and social atmosphere of mid-nineteenth century Britain, particularly Scotland, will help put Hector's collecting into context.

Withers and Finnegan's research into the many natural history societies in nineteenth century Scotland sheds light on local cultures of collecting that Hector may have been aware of as a young man. Local scientific societies for the study of geology, botany, archaeology and entomology among others valued natural knowledge and

⁵³⁶ Adrienne L. Kaeppler, "'Artificial Curiosities'" (Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 1978), 38; See also King, *Artificial Curiosities*, 11.

⁵³⁷ King, *Artificial Curiosities*, 11.

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

“promote[d] civic identity through scientific practice.”⁵³⁹ Fieldwork undertaken across the Scottish scientific societies was a localized intellectual practice, though one whose credibility depended upon discussion and display outside the local context. As I will show, Hector’s professional profile was developed in a social and intellectual milieu in which interconnected scientific subjects were tied up more broadly with “moral, recreational and educational questions.”⁵⁴⁰ We will see some of Hector’s moral concerns regarding the futures of North American Indigenous peoples further in this chapter.

Hector graduated in medicine from the University of Edinburgh where his dissertation topic was “The Antiquity of Man.”⁵⁴¹ Having received a “broad education encompassing many aspects of natural history,” Hector was particularly drawn to geology and this interest, combined with his Edinburgh connections, earned him the attention of Sir Roderick Murchison, the Scottish geologist and archaeologist who appointed Hector geologist to the Palliser Expedition. This opportunity was what brought Hector to Canada from 1857-1860.⁵⁴² As Henare points out, Hector’s

⁵³⁹ Charles W.J. Withers and Diarmid A. Finnegan, “Natural History Societies, Fieldwork and Local Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Scotland: Towards a Historical Geography of Civic Science,” *Cultural Geographies* 10 (2003), 334.

⁵⁴⁰ Withers and Finnegan, “Natural History Societies,” 346.

⁵⁴¹ Amira Henare, *Museums, Anthropology and Imperial Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 164.

⁵⁴² Ibid.

dissertation topic “involved him in one of the most topical debates of the mid-nineteenth century.”⁵⁴³

In the 1850s, theories on the antiquity of humanity emerged as archaeological and geological research in the UK converged at specific physical field sites whose material evidence suggested human existence predated the 6000-year estimate promoted by Christian doctrine. By the time Hector submitted his dissertation in 1856, “European understandings [of the origins of humanity] were poised on the brink of a ‘Revolution in Human Time.’”⁵⁴⁴ Though just a young man when he set off for Canada, Hector contributed to a number of reports on the geology, botany, climate, and ethnology of North America. His ethnological observations are discussed further in this chapter to show how his comments on the Indigenous peoples of what would become Canada were informed by the scientific, social and philosophical debates of his day.

Between completing his dissertation and leaving for Canada, Hector worked as an assistant to Sir James Young Simpson, an Edinburgh doctor, member of the Society of Antiquaries, and archaeologist who used ethnographic specimens to “shed light on antiquity” and whose scientific scheme “called for ongoing collecting, in Scotland and

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁴ Henare, *Museums, Anthropology and Imperial Exchange*, 164-165. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 69, quoted in Henare, *Museums, Anthropology and Imperial Exchange*, 164.

abroad.”⁵⁴⁵ As Henare points out, Simpson’s methodology, and “particularly his recipe for thinking through things,” was applied by his student. For Simpson, scientific truth was to be ascertained through the study of the material world. Hector inherited this empirical research approach (a scientific genealogy), and collected a range of natural and artificial specimens on his travels.⁵⁴⁶ Though empirical scientific methodologies are standard practice today, in Victorian Britain, empiricism was at odds with “text-based systems of thought” and the received wisdom of the Bible.⁵⁴⁷ It is in the context of this British “philosophical fracas” that Hector found himself upon his return from Canada in 1860.⁵⁴⁸ He donated his collection of First Nations objects to the Industrial Museum of Scotland immediately upon his return to the UK, which suggests this was not an overly personal collection.⁵⁴⁹

4.5.1 *The Palliser Expedition (1857-1860)*

As noted, Murchison appointed the freshly graduated Hector as surgeon and geologist to the British North America Exploring Expedition led by John Palliser, an Irish

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., 163-164.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid., 163-165.

⁵⁴⁷ Henare, *Museums, Anthropology and Imperial Exchange*, 164.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 167.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., 164.

explorer and geographer.⁵⁵⁰ The expedition's objective was to collect scientific data and report to the British government on the state of the HBC territories. From 1857-1860 Palliser's party traveled across eastern and western Canada, reaching Victoria where they briefly stayed before departing for England in 1860.

A complete account of the Expedition's contributions to science and colonial settlement is available in the detailed papers and reports submitted by Palliser, Hector and their colleagues to the British government and scientific societies to which they belonged. Their reports illuminate the expedition parties' movements across the land, and the economic and social landscape of the Fort Vancouver and Fort Victoria areas, which they reached near the end of the expedition in 1860. Traveling in the gold-rich regions west of the Columbia River in the wake of the 1858 Fraser River gold rush, Palliser commented on the "enormous" prices his party paid for provisions; he also reported that clothing and food were the only items with which Indigenous guides would be paid for their services on a journey, owing to the absence of cash money in the Oregon territory.⁵⁵¹ Having parted ways in August at the Saskatchewan River,

⁵⁵⁰ Roderick Murchison was a Scottish geologist and archaeologist appointed director-general of the British Geological Survey, and director of the Royal School of Mines and the Museum of Practical Geology on Jermyn Street in London in 1855.

⁵⁵¹ Letter, John Palliser to Her Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies [undated], in "Further Papers Relative to the Expedition under Captain Palliser," presented to both Houses of Parliament by

Hector and Palliser arrived at Fort Vancouver together at the end of November 1859.⁵⁵² There, Palliser found the HBC establishment, then in its final year of existence, “considerably reduced” and involved in territorial disputes with the United States, as Fort Vancouver was the headquarters of American troops in the Oregon territory. Directing Hector to remain two weeks at Vancouver to await the arrival of the party’s luggage, Palliser left on the San Francisco-Portland-Victoria steamship. At Victoria, he and his party found

great commercial industry, and much promise of progress. The inhabitants are English, Scotch, Americans, Chinese, and Indians, who rove about the streets, the former seeking and commencing to find employment, the latter begging, drinking, and not likely ever to become useful to the community...the Hudson’s Bay Company have one of their forts...in the centre of the town, splendidly supplied with almost every kind of merchandise. Besides this, warehouses, stores, and shops carry on a good business.⁵⁵³

Palliser’s comments exclude Indigenous people from colonial society, a topic recently investigated by Penelope Edmonds in her analysis of 1850s Victoria streetscapes.⁵⁵⁴

Hector joined the party at Victoria in mid-January 1860, and shortly after he left on a

Command of Her Majesty (London: George Edward Eyre and William Spottiswoode, Printers to the Queen, 1860), 16.

⁵⁵² Letter, Palliser to Her Majesty’s Secretary of State for the Colonies, 8 July 1860, in “Further Papers,” 20.

⁵⁵³ Letter, Palliser to Her Majesty’s Secretary of State for the Colonies, 8 July 1860, in “Further Papers,” 20.

⁵⁵⁴ Penelope Edmonds, “Unpacking Settler Colonialism’s Urban Strategies: Indigenous Peoples in Victoria, British Columbia, and the Transition to a Settler-Colonial City,” *Urban History Review* 38 (2) (2010): 4-20.

week's journey to research coal structures at Nanaimo, where the HBC mined coal from 1854. In mid-March, Hector and Palliser departed from Esquimalt Harbour on the San Francisco steamer, arriving in California one week later, and waited a further fortnight at San Francisco to start their journey back to England.

At San Francisco, Hector acquired Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859). Many years later he recalled,

I first obtained a copy of Darwin's *Origin of Species* in San Francisco when on my way home from a three-year sojourn among the Red Indians in the Rocky Mountains. Having heard nothing of the controversies, I received the teaching with enthusiasm, and felt very much surprised on returning to my alma mater to find that I was treated as a heretic and a backslider. Nowadays it is difficult to realize what all the fuss and fierce controversy was about.⁵⁵⁵

Hector returned home to find his friends and colleagues in the scientific world "reeling" from the impact of *The Origins*, combined with new archaeological evidence associating human remains with ancient fossil specimens in a cave in the south of England.⁵⁵⁶ While he was conducting fieldwork in Canada, an intellectual and moral crisis was unfolding in Britain in which material evidence was being weighed against

⁵⁵⁵ James Hector, "Inaugural Address," *Report of the third meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science, Christchurch, New Zealand, 1891* (Wellington: Government Printer, 1891), 1-21, quoted in Henare, *Museums, Anthropology and Imperial Exchange*, 165-166.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 165.

the teachings of the Bible in accounting for the origins of humanity. As Henare has observed, these mid-nineteenth century debates continue to unfold in the present.⁵⁵⁷

Hector collected fossils and natural history specimens on the expedition. In his July 1860 report to the colonial Secretary of State in London, Palliser noted that Hector's collections of "fossils, &c." were "from time to time transmitted to Sir Roderick Murchison at the Jermyn Street Museum."⁵⁵⁸ A November 1860 letter from the HBC Secretary in London addressed to Hector at the National Club, London, notified Hector that the HBC held a detailed note of the packages received at HBC House which Hector had sent from the HBC territories and Vancouver Island, and that these packages had been forwarded by Hector's directions to the Jermyn Street Museum. Listed on this letter were two cases sent from Vancouver Island via the ship "Princess Royal," delivered to the Museum in the summer of 1860.⁵⁵⁹ Referring to the Museum of Practical Geology, the "Jermyn Street Museum" in London is now part of the Natural History Museum, and its Mineralogy collections contain a piece of graphite from Vancouver Island donated by Hector.⁵⁶⁰

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid., 166-167.

⁵⁵⁸ Letter, Palliser to Her Majesty's Secretary of State for the Colonies, 8 July 1860, in "Further Papers," 23.

⁵⁵⁹ Letter, Thomas Fraser to James Hector, A.5/24 fo. 118, HBCA.

⁵⁶⁰ Museum database was disabled at the time of writing.

Though nowhere in his reports does Hector reference his collection of Haida argillite carving he did report on the existence of argillites and shales in British Columbia and on Vancouver Island, the latter of which he found at the Nanaimo mine site. It was in Nanaimo, Hector reported, that “the coal is procured which is already rendering Vancouver’s Island of considerable mercantile importance in the San Francisco market. I had only a few days to spend in the examination of this very interesting district, but I saw enough to convince me of the value and considerable extent of this coal deposit.”⁵⁶¹ From Nanaimo, Hector sent fossil specimens back to England, which presumably formed part of the two cases that arrived at the HBC headquarters in London in late August 1860. Hector was collecting natural history specimens for scientific and economic purposes.

Hector elaborates on the history, labour force and output of the Nanaimo coalmines in his report, *On the Geology of the Country between Lake Superior and the Pacific Ocean* (1861). The Indigenous labourers who worked there, he observed, consisted of “small tribes of whom come and settle at the mines and work for a short time until they tire of the uncongenial life, when they leave to make room for another band. The irregular supply of labour from this cause adds greatly to the uncertainty

⁵⁶¹ James Hector, Enclosure 2 in No. 4, to John Palliser, 8 July 1860, in “Further Papers Relative to the Expedition under Captain Palliser,” 27-28.

and expense of the workings.”⁵⁶² Here we see a contrast between Hector’s description of the productivity of Indigenous workers at the Nanaimo coalmines and the urban Indigenous people Palliser described at Victoria. As Edmonds has observed, the city of Victoria “and the entire colony continued to rely on Indigenous labour” as early as the 1840s, “a fact that was reflected in the streetscape,” even though Indigenous peoples were excluded from developing settler society.⁵⁶³

On Vancouver Island in 1859, Hector’s two objectives – to collect natural history specimens for the advancement of science, and to report on the colony’s natural resource potential for the advancement of British colonial interests – are made clear in his geological report:

The existence of coal or lignite on the Pacific coast, of quality fit for the purposes of raising steam, is of great commercial importance, and that obtained from Nanaimo is as yet admitted to be the best in the market. If these beds are therefore discovered to be persistent, so that they can be worked to advantage on a large scale, there is little doubt that this coal, even though it be an imperfect substitute for the finer coal to which we are accustomed in this country, will form a valuable source of wealth to the new British colony.⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶² James Hector, “On the Geology of the Country between Lake Superior and the Pacific Ocean (between the 48th and 54th parallels of latitude), visited by the Government Exploring Expedition under the command of Captain J. Palliser (1857-60),” *Quarterly Journal of the Geological Society* 1861 (17): 388-445, 428-429.

⁵⁶³ Edmonds, “Unpacking Settler Colonialism’s Urban Strategies,” 6, 7.

⁵⁶⁴ Hector, “On the Geology,” 436.

Hector reported elsewhere that the physical character of Vancouver Island and British Columbia – their mountainous landscape and many inlets – provided excellent access to the mineral wealth of both colonies. By then familiar with this landscape, Hector took a longer view of the colonies’ potential, which he enthusiastically reported upon. “Sooner or later,” he predicted, “it will be seen how wonderfully this new colony is adapted by nature for mining, fisheries, and commerce.”⁵⁶⁵

4.5.2 *Indigenous (in)authenticity*

Doing the jobs he was hired to do, Hector promoted the commercial and colonial development of North America through scientific research and survey. He also reported upon the many different Indigenous peoples of North America and their living conditions in the developing settler-colonial situation. In their *Notice of the Indians Seen by the Exploring Expedition under the Command of Captain Palliser*, Hector and his co-author, the British Museum antiquarian W.S.W. Vaux, challenged the image of “the Indian [as a] romantic personage,” citing the novels of James Fenimore Cooper as a source for such “imaginative” constructions. In reality, they write, the “manners, life, and habits” of “these interesting and remarkable tribes,” have been portrayed in the “able work” of the American painter George Catlin, whose

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid., 430.

portraits of Native American people recorded the appearance and culture of what

Catlin – and many of his contemporaries – believed to be a vanishing people.⁵⁶⁶

Hector and Vaux's *Notice*, submitted to the Royal Anthropological Institute (1861)

also described Cree, Blackfoot, Kootanie (Ktunaxa) and Carrier groups. Strangely, the

authors acknowledge, but do not report upon, the Northwest Coast people Hector

encountered on Vancouver Island, such as those whom he noted laboured at the

Nanaimo mines.⁵⁶⁷

The *Notice* gives some insight into where Indigenous peoples fit within a mid-nineteenth century British scientific and settler-colonial worldview. "The only way," they report, "to obtain correct notions of the Indians, is to observe them in their native haunts far from the influence of civilization; thus, and thus only, is there any chance of discerning the prominent elements of the character of these aborigines."⁵⁶⁸ This view of the "real" Indian, culturally unaffected by European contact and colonialism, denied authenticity to urban Aboriginal people. Though today's social scientists assert that

⁵⁶⁶ In *Illustrations of the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians*, Catlin illustrates two argillite pipes, Plate 210 ½.

⁵⁶⁷ Hector and Vaux conclude their report: "The other tribes of Indians seen by the expedition to the west of the Rocky Mountains, were all within the American territory excepting those at Vancouver's Island, to whom it is not necessary to allude in this report." Hector and Vaux, "Notice of the Indians Seen by the Exploring Expedition under the Command of Captain Palliser," *Transactions of the Royal Ethnological Society of London*, 1 (1861), 261.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 245-261; 245-246.

“Aboriginal histories are necessarily urban histories,” the Victorian scientific worldview saw the construction of a framework for authenticity in which cultural change was denied, and which alluded to the “disappearing Indian,” a developing idea that would inform the systematic ethnographic collecting practices of a generation of late nineteenth-century anthropologists.⁵⁶⁹

Hector and Vaux’s *Notice* attempted to deconstruct reductive binary characterizations of the romantic “noble savage” and real Indigenous people who were seen to “live on the borders of civilization, degraded as [they were] by their begging habits and attachment to ardent spirits.”⁵⁷⁰ It is possible that Hector witnessed Indigenous people affected by poverty and substance abuse in colonial urban centres like Victoria as early as the 1860s. Though they problematized the image of the noble savage and the so-called corrupted “border dweller,” the authors understood “civilization” as a corrupting force, but one which promised improvement through the

⁵⁶⁹ See Edmonds, “Unpacking Settler Colonialism’s Urban Strategies,” 4. Harris has pointed out that during Franz Boas’s fieldwork on the Northwest Coast, the anthropologist “had little interest in the native societies around him (which, he thought, were becoming “civilized”), except insofar as they supplied informants about earlier, pre-contact times.” See Cole Harris, “How Did Colonialism Dispossess? Comments from an Edge of Empire,” in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94 (1) (2004), 170.

⁵⁷⁰ Hector and Vaux, “Notice of the Indians,” 245-246.

cultivation of property, the development of a settled, agricultural lifestyle (upon which the “civilization/savagery” dichotomy turned), missionization and government.⁵⁷¹

The “Thickwood Crees” for example, who reportedly showed the most potential for civilization, were thought to be the most amenable to missionization, and “under proper management” could be induced to “cultivate plots of land from which they might derive a more sure supply of food when trapping furs.”⁵⁷² Encouraging Indigenous people to develop agricultural lands was partly based on the assumption that their actual use of the land for hunting and trapping was inefficient and wasteful. More generally, the perceived incompatibility of Indigenous peoples’ seasonal, cyclical lifestyles with the style of work required of capitalism led to settler-colonial assumptions that Native people were unproductive. “A discourse that treated colonial land as waste awaiting development and its inhabitants as backward and lazy,” writes Harris, “allowed the improvements of a people’s habits *and* land uses to become a cultural imperative, part of the civilizing mission, and a manifestation of progress. It validated the dispossessions and repossessions intrinsic to settler colonialism...while adding a veneer of altruism.”⁵⁷³ Hector’s sojourn to the land that would become

⁵⁷¹ Ibid. See Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (222-225), for a discussion of mid-nineteenth century anthropological ideas of morality.

⁵⁷² Hector and Vaux, “Notice of the Indians,” 249.

⁵⁷³ Harris, “How did colonialism dispossess?” 174.

British Columbia was a different kind of contact zone from earlier decades of the fur trade. During the 1820s for example, conditions of uneven reciprocity could be actively negotiated between Indigenous people and newcomers; by the late 1850s and 60s, the land and its people were being enfolded into a developing settler-colonial state, signalling a shift in the relationship between Aboriginal people and Europeans.

Though elsewhere critical of the HBC for perpetuating “unequal competition,” and the “wandering and precarious mode of [fur trade] life,” the authors describe the Company and its relations with Indigenous peoples as an example of how “the Indians [were] capable of being governed.” They recommended that it was part of the “duty of the civiliser” to encourage an agricultural, industrial way of life in the course of inevitable European settlement and colonization.⁵⁷⁴ Unlike most fur traders (besides those who became colonial administrators such as James Douglas) explorers like Hector directly contributed to colonial developments through his collections and reports, and held the same moral views on the colonial imperative to civilize and settle Indigenous people as his contemporaries.⁵⁷⁵ While the aid and protection of these new “British subjects” was in Hector’s view a corollary of colonization, Hector insisted that authentically Indigenous people were only to be found far from white settlements.

⁵⁷⁴ Hector and Vaux, “Notice of the Indians,” 245-261.

⁵⁷⁵ George Stocking, “Victorian Cultural Ideology and the Image of Savagery (1780-1870),” in *Victorian Anthropology*, 186-237.

4.5.3 *Hector's collection*

Members of the Expedition reached Forts Vancouver and Victoria in its final months, and both locations were places where argillite carving was available. James Hector's collection of 26 objects from the Plains, Rocky Mountains and Northwest Coast was recorded in the 1861 Annual Report of the Industrial Museum of Scotland. 1861, noted Director Thomas Archer, was a particularly successful year for the Museum, which received nearly 3000 items, most of which were acquired "through personal application to the donors, who have been unsparingly liberal when the objects of the Industrial Museum have been fairly made known."⁵⁷⁶ Hector probably donated these objects in response to the Museum's call to collect. Among the "principal" collections of "Articles Wholly Manufactured,"

Dr. Hector has also brought us from the Rocky Mountains a number of interesting specimens of the manufactures of the Blackfoot and other Indians of the northwest coast of North America... [which included] 25 North American Indian models and specimens, including dog sledges, snow shoes, objects made from horn, carved wooden implements, carved stone pipes, whistles, plates, &c.⁵⁷⁷

While it is known that Hector used some of the items that he donated to the Industrial Museum on his travels, there is apparently no documentation identifying the precise provenance of his argillite collection, which is noted on Museum catalogue cards as

⁵⁷⁶ Industrial Museum of Scotland. *Annual Report of the Industrial Museum, Scotland* (Appendix Y) (Edinburgh, 1 January 1862) 177.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid.

having been collected from the “shores of British Columbia.”⁵⁷⁸ Though Vancouver Island and British Columbia were separate colonies in 1860, it is possible given the Haida encampments at Victoria that Hector would have acquired them there, where he and Palliser spent several weeks at the end of the three-year expedition.

In April 1859, an informal survey of the Native peoples living at the “Northerners Encampment” located at Small Bay outside Victoria, estimated a population of 2,235 individuals from the northern Northwest Coast. In this camp, a count of 1,545 individuals’ tribal affiliations revealed that 26% were Haida, in addition to Tsimshian, Stikine Tlingit, Heiltsuk and Kwakwaka’wakw people.⁵⁷⁹ Of the approximately 400 Haidas, there would surely have been several artists among them, argillite carvers included, from whom Hector may have procured argillite, or who could have supplied sellers of argillite in Victoria. If Hector did acquire the carvings in Victoria, they could have been purchased with cash, which, as Palliser noted, was used to pay workers for wage-labour at the time of their visit.⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁷⁸ Catalogue cards for James Hector “Northwest Coast” collections, Department of World Cultures, National Museums Scotland.

⁵⁷⁹ Boyd, *The Coming of the Spirit of Pestilence*, 176-177. Boyd (177) writes that, “of the 1,545 (in 111 ‘huts’) whose tribal affiliation was given, 44% were Tsimshian, 26% Haida, 15% Tlingit, 8% Heiltsuk, and 7 % Kwakwaka’wakw (*Victoria Weekly Gazette*, 29 April 1869).”

⁵⁸⁰ Palliser, “Further Papers,” 20.

How was Hector's collection absorbed into the Industrial Museum of Scotland? The "leading principle" upon which the Industrial Museum was founded was articulated by Director Thomas Archer in an 1861 public address and shows how Hector's donation would have been valued in its new context. According to Archer, the Museum was founded upon,

the exposition of the industrial arts of life. I was going to say civilised life, but we shall not confine ourselves to the works of civilised man, for it is both useful and interesting to consider the works of the untutored savage. Such contemplation often affords us useful hints for our improvement, and still more frequently suggests to us means whereby we can render to such children of nature the aids they most require, and thus extend the blessings of civilisation.⁵⁸¹

These objects were understood as "tokens of industry," were used to express an imperial vision of foreign lands, and were used to document the "technical advancement of the West through contrast with the rudimentary tools of various savage cultures."⁵⁸² Crediting such collectors as Dr David Livingstone and various HBC traders for their contributions, Archer spoke to where ethnographic objects fit in the moral and scientific schema of mid-nineteenth century Britain: as evidence of the material cultures and technologies of supposedly lesser-developed peoples, as

⁵⁸¹ "Chamber of Commerce Conversazione – Address by Professor Archer," *The Scotsman*, 14 February 1861. "Scrapbook 1, 1857-1882," National Museums Scotland Archives.

⁵⁸² Thomas, *Entangled Objects*, 175.

educational tools for civilized society, and to justify the spread of civilization through agricultural improvement, missionary work and government.

Hector donated his collection immediately before his 1862 departure for New Zealand, where he quickly “began to form collections of rocks, minerals, fossils and other materials representing the geology and natural resources of New Zealand.”⁵⁸³

This collection was crystallized as Hector’s first contribution to science in his native country, before forming the scientific legacy in the Pacific for which he is more widely remembered.⁵⁸⁴ Insight into the official collections Hector made on the Palliser expedition can be gleaned from his published papers and reports, which as noted included fragments of plants and fossils from Vancouver Island and the Rocky Mountains.⁵⁸⁵ From the mainland, Hector sent home coal and sandstones containing fossil leaves.⁵⁸⁶ Furthermore, he reported that in the vicinity of Nanaimo there existed shales, “with which the fossil leaves are generally procured.” On one level Hector’s argillite carvings fit the framework of his professional pursuits in geology and natural

⁵⁸³ I did not find any correspondence in the Industrial Museum Letterbooks from the years 1861-62 relating to James Hector, however several letters from Director Thomas Archer to various donors thank them for donating to, adding to, or completing collections. See Henare, *Museums, Anthropology and Imperial Exchange*, 167.

⁵⁸⁴ See Henare, *Museums, Anthropology and Imperial Exchange*, 167-178 and Simon Nathan and Mary Varnham, *The Amazing World of James Hector: Explorer, Geologist, Botanist, Natural Historian, and one of New Zealand’s Most Remarkable Figures* (Wellington: Awa Press, 2009).

⁵⁸⁵ Hector, “On the Geology,” 435.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 431.

history, and their entry into the Museum as “specimens” sheds light on their status and value as scientific objects.

4.5.4 *The argillite carvings: objects as specimens*

Hector’s collection of ten carvings represents a range in argillite types. At the time of his visit to the Northwest Coast, Haida artists were still carving European-themed works, and Hector’s collection includes one mug (Figure 22), a ship pipe (Figure 24), two recorders (Figure 25) and two plates.⁵⁸⁷ The remaining four pieces in his collection include a carving fragment depicting what appears to be a sea otter and thunderbird, two pipes respectively representing a dragonfly (Figure 23) and human/animal figure in transformation, and a panel pipe.⁵⁸⁸

⁵⁸⁷ These objects are respectively numbered A.702.9; A.702.11C; A.702.12; A.702.12A; A.702.7; A.702.8.

⁵⁸⁸ These objects are respectively numbered A.702.10; A.702.11A; A.702.11B; A.702.11D.



Figure 22. Argillite mug
National Museum of Scotland
James Hector collection (1861)
A.702.9
5.2 cm x 9 cm
Image © National Museums Scotland



Figure 23. Argillite pipe
National Museum of Scotland
James Hector collection (1861)
A.702.11A
15.5 cm x 5 cm x 1.5 cm
Image © National Museums Scotland



Figure 24. Argillite ship pipe
National Museum of Scotland
James Hector collection (1861)
A.702.11C
19 cm x 5.6 cm x 2.4 cm
Image courtesy National Museums Scotland

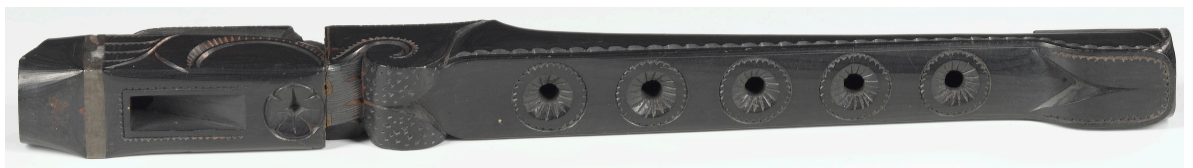


Figure 25. Argillite recorder
National Museum of Scotland
James Hector collection (1861)
A.702.12
22.1 cm x 2.3 cm x 2.5 cm
Image courtesy National Museums Scotland

An art historical analysis of these objects is available in a master's dissertation by Alexander Dawkins, and certainly this discussion could be complemented by a fuller visual analysis in light of the art historical contributions of Kaufmann, Wright,

Sheehan and Macnair and Hoover.⁵⁸⁹ This thesis however discusses these pieces in light of the scientific framework that guided Hector's acquisitions, and their categorization as "specimen" (as opposed to "curiosity") in relation to Europeans' ideas about Indigenous others.

In the broader context of his collection of argillites, shales and fossils, it is not surprising that argillite carving would have interested Hector as geological specimens and as examples of the industrial arts of "other" peoples. Having apparently written nothing about these objects, or about the peoples he encountered on Vancouver Island, Hector's collection poses more questions than answers. His descriptions of the other First Nations people he encountered across Canada however shows his engagement in the construction of ideas of Indigenous authenticity, the visualization of colonial/Canadian futures, and an assumed exclusion of Aboriginal peoples from civilized futures. Still, entered into the Industrial Museum as "specimens" of Indigenous manufacture (as opposed to "curios"), suggests, as Archer outlined, that these works testified to something more than curiosity, but perhaps as examples of the potential for the so-called civilization of Indigenous others.

⁵⁸⁹ Alexander Dawkins, "Western Canada, Colonialism and Doctor Hector: An Investigation into the Royal Museum of Scotland's Argillite Holdings" (MA diss., University of Edinburgh, 2006).

Some mid-nineteenth century observers saw such carvings as representative of Indigenous ingenuity. As I noted in Chapter 2, Vancouver Island's catalogue entry for London's 1862 Industrial Exhibition, which included argillite carving, noted, "that the Indians...are ingenious may be seen by their works on exhibition," and that such works would be useful to "show capitalists that there was bone, muscle, energy and intellect [on Vancouver Island] waiting for employment."⁵⁹⁰ As Thomas has noted, the use of Indigenous material culture to demonstrate Native industry in the Pacific context "displaced the negatives of savagery and abrupt civilizing transformations with a discourse of improvement, suggesting progress and [colonial] development within an existing fabric."⁵⁹¹ Though Hector's argillite collecting dovetailed with his geological interests, as specimens of Native industries and skilled workmanship, these objects may also have played into "Victorian ideologies of improvement," a worldview, which as we have seen, coloured Hector's descriptions of the Indigenous people he met on his Canadian sojourn.⁵⁹²

⁵⁹⁰ "Industrial Exhibition Meeting," *British Colonist*, 13 February 1861, <http://archive.org/stream/dailycolonist18610213uvic/18610213#page/n0/mode/1up>. See also "Catalogue of the Vancouver Contribution," London International Exhibition 1862 (London: June, 1862), 1, 6.

⁵⁹¹ Thomas, *Entangled Objects*, 177.

⁵⁹² Ibid.

4.6 The John Rae collection

John Rae's collection of over 270 First Nations and Inuit objects now at the NMS includes nearly 50 works of sacred, spiritual and ceremonial use from Vancouver Island, the central interior of British Columbia and Alaska. Rae's wife Kate donated his collection to the University of Edinburgh after Rae's death in London in 1893. Since 1926 it has been on long-term loan at the National Museums Scotland (then called the Royal Scottish Museum).

Rae like Hector attended medical school at the University of Edinburgh, and by the time the HBC contracted him to undertake a telegraph survey in 1864 he had been retired from the Company for several years. Rae had much experience living and working with Inuit, Cree and Métis peoples over the course of his life as an HBC trader, surgeon and Arctic explorer. Though the 1864 expedition was his first trip west of the Rockies, the notes and labels left with his collection of objects from the Northwest Coast reflect some knowledge of the material culture of Haida, Tsimshian and Tlingit peoples. Whether or not he encountered Northwest Coast people in Victoria is unclear. Upon his death, Rae left his wife,

for life if she desires to keep them my stone implements Eskimo and other curiosities and after her death or if she does not care to keep them that these be given to the Museum of the Edinburgh University Scotland where I studied

medicine and to be placed there if possible in one group[,] I also desire that in like manner [my] deer Antlers and other horns be given to the museum.⁵⁹³

Correspondence (1897-1899) between Mrs. Rae and Edinburgh antiquarian David MacRitchie – whom Mrs. Rae commissioned to construct and publish a catalogue to accompany the collection according to Rae’s notes and labels – show her desire to preserve the collection as Rae wished. She was unhappy with the way it was presented, in an “untidy looking case” at the University’s Library Hall, where it was displayed from 1895, and she was anxious that the catalogue be completed before time eroded recognition of her husband’s contributions to science and exploration.⁵⁹⁴ She wrote to MacRitchie in 1897:

The University will soon be breaking up [for summer holidays], and they have forgotten all about me and the Catalogue...’ With regard to the catalogue, I think you must be doing something more ambitious than I contemplated as the printing will come to so much, but I will willingly pay it to have the collection properly represented, I have often thought sadly of that untidy looking case during this year, when attention has been so much directed to Arctic matters, and longed that I could fly over and arrange it, but do not tell the poor Librarian.⁵⁹⁵

As the catalogue took shape, Mrs. Rae expressed her dissatisfaction with some of MacRitchie’s annotations regarding provenance and materials, wishing instead to

⁵⁹³ John Rae, Will and Testament, MS 921; D. John Rae Archives, Scott Polar Research Centre, Cambridge.

⁵⁹⁴ Kate Rae to David MacRitchie, 1 July 1897. Rae 1.33. Rae Archive, Department of World Cultures, NMS.

⁵⁹⁵ Rae to MacRitchie, 1 July 1897.

preserve the authenticity of Rae's collection. Mrs. Rae wrote MacRitchie in 1898 about

"those old Indian things":

Most of these things he got himself, but he used to ask friends in different districts to look out for the kind of things he wanted in the Indian Country, all the Eskimo things he got in his travels, and I know all the Indian things he got himself, he was in British Columbia, but not on Queen Charlotte's Island but many of those curious Chinese looking things he collected when there, and brought home with him, others were sent to him...the things should be described as he named them himself.⁵⁹⁶

Mrs. Rae's preoccupation with the classification of her husband's collection lasted a number of years and reveals her devotion to preserve its integrity despite her gaps in knowledge regarding the circumstances in which some things were collected. As I explain below, Rae's collection carries significant personal baggage. His Northwest Coast collection in particular may also be the most ambivalent, assembled during a time in his life during which, as Lidchi suggests, he was "reconstruct[ing] his identity" as a traveler more than an explorer.⁵⁹⁷

By August 1899, Mrs. Rae seems to have given up on the catalogue, which in the end was never published. "I think that matter is hopeless at present," she wrote. "It has been a revelation to me, I am sure you have done all you can, and I am very grateful

⁵⁹⁶ Kate Rae to David MacRitchie, 12 June 1898. Rae 1.35. Rae Archive, Department of World Cultures, NMS.

⁵⁹⁷ Henrietta Lidchi, "Mild Hobbies and their legacies," paper presented at the *John Rae 200* Conference, Stromness, Orkney, 28-30 September 2013, 7.

for all the trouble you have taken.”⁵⁹⁸ The catalogue was intended to complete Rae’s collection as a body of objects that would honour his life’s work.

In all the accounts of Dr Rae there are so many mistakes and so much that is misleading and of which I have the facts, and this makes one so sad that his life is not yet published, but all these years I have been attending to work which had to be done for him and which he would have wished me to consider.⁵⁹⁹

The biographical weight of Rae’s collection is discussed below.

4.6.1 *The telegraph survey and early colonial Victoria*

Like Hector, Rae’s visit to Victoria concluded a professional survey expedition, though Rae only spent a brief ten days there. In Victoria only four years after Hector, the place that Rae encountered was rapidly transforming from fur trade to settler-dominated city. Having arrived only two years after a devastating smallpox epidemic, Rae must have encountered fewer Haidas in Victoria than Hector had in 1860. The 1862 smallpox epidemic traveled from San Francisco to Victoria with an infected gold miner, and, in the summer of that year, was carried north along the coast by Indigenous groups expelled from Victoria by colonial authorities. It is possible that the absence of Haida people at Victoria at that time may have diminished the availability of argillite carvings.

⁵⁹⁸ Kate Rae to David MacRitchie, 19 August 1899. Rae 1.38. Rae Archive, Department of World Cultures, NMS.

⁵⁹⁹ Kate Rae to David MacRitchie, 21 November 1907. Rae 1.44. Rae Archive, Department of World Cultures, NMS.

Rae's British Columbia sojourn was apparently his first and last trip west of the Rocky Mountains. He was chosen by the HBC in 1864 to survey a potential telegraph route from the Red River settlement to the Pacific coast. The HBC wanted a means of connecting their trading posts as prairie settlement spread westward. Though Rae, the HBC's "most celebrated explorer," had resigned from the HBC in 1856, he was willing to make the trip on short notice.⁶⁰⁰ "My coming out was a rather hurried affair," Rae wrote a friend from Victoria, "as I knew nothing about the matter until nine days before leaving England."⁶⁰¹ Historian William Barr summarizes Rae's remarkable journey:

Travelling with wagons and Red River carts [Rae] covered the distance from Fort Garry to Fort Edmonton (some 1320 km) in thirty-four days, including stops, for an average daily distance of thirty-nine kilometres per day. He travelled the section from Lake Ste. Anne to Tête Jaune Cache [over the first half of the Rocky Mountains], almost entirely on foot, by his own statement, in nineteen days of travelling, for an average daily distance of thirty-one and a half kilometres. And finally, he travelled a minimum distance of 450 kilometres down the Fraser River, from Tête Jaune Cache [over the second half of the Rockies] to Fort Alexandria by canoe in eight days (including a rest day at Quesnel).⁶⁰²

⁶⁰⁰ EE Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1870*. London: The Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1959, Vol. II, 843, in Robert L. Richards, *Dr John Rae* (Whitby: Caedmon of Whitby, 1985), 145.

⁶⁰¹ John Rae to [unidentified] friend, "The overland telegraph letter from Dr. Rae," *The British Colonist*, 22 September 1864.

⁶⁰² William Barr, "Conclusion," in "Dr. John Rae's Telegraph Survey, St. Paul, Minnesota to Quesnel, British Columbia, 1864," in *Manitoba History* 38 (Autumn/Winter 1999-2000), [no page numbers]. *The*

From Fort Alexandria, Rae continued down the Fraser River to Yale, New Westminster and finally onward to Victoria by steamer, where he was enthusiastically received by a community of colonial peers.

The HBC's lease of Vancouver Island from the British government expired in late May 1859, and by the end of that year (shortly after the departure of Hector and Palliser) the Northwest Coast was under British sovereignty. James Douglas, who had been made governor of the colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia, retired in 1864, so Rae walked into a Victoria whose identity as an HBC trading post was waning. Victoria was coming increasingly under the control of settlers, not fur traders, and the settlers' relationship with Indigenous peoples was very different from that of the fur trader.⁶⁰³ If Hector and Rae encountered Haida people in Victoria, the social landscape may have been very different following the smallpox epidemic.

Boyd's population estimates (calculated from an average of three nineteenth century censuses) report 9,490 Haidas (on Haida Gwaii) in the early nineteenth century, a population that dropped to about 6,327 after an 1836 smallpox epidemic. By 1882, the population had dropped still further to 1,658.⁶⁰⁴ As I noted earlier, Haidas

Manitoba Historical Society, accessed 18 October 2015,
http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/38/raetelegraphsurvey.shtml.

⁶⁰³ Some fur traders also later became settlers.

⁶⁰⁴ Boyd, *The Coming of the Spirit of Pestilence*, 209, 217.

and several Northern coastal groups had moved to Fort Victoria in the mid 1850s and with the influx of commercial opportunity that came with the 1858 gold rush they assembled for trade at the “Northerners Encampment” outside Victoria. With the outbreak of smallpox in April 1862, the Haidas, making up 26% of the “northerners” whose tribal affiliation was given, established a camp at Cadboro Bay, four miles east of Victoria. On 11 May local authorities, supported by two recently arrived British gunboats, the *Grappler* and *Forward*, evicted the Haida camp.⁶⁰⁵ Of the roughly twenty-five canoes of Haidas that reportedly departed from Victoria, a few escaped the eviction at Cadboro Bay, but it was reported later that several had died.⁶⁰⁶ The Haidas remaining at the Northerners Camp were left homeless when on 13 May the police burned their houses and evicted them, according to the *British Colonist*, to an island in the Straits east of Vancouver Island.⁶⁰⁷

The number of First Nations people who died in Victoria in 1862 is not known.

In 1863 it was reported in a local newspaper that “the bodies of from 1000 to 1200 Northern Indians, who have fallen victims to the small-pox lie unburied in the space of about an acre of ground a little bit to the west of the reserve and a stone’s throw from

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid., 186.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid., 180-182.

⁶⁰⁷ *British Colonist*, 13 May. Quoted in Boyd, Boyd, *Coming of the Spirit of Pestilence*, 180-181.

the schoolhouse.”⁶⁰⁸ If over 1000 of the estimated 2235 individuals at the Northerners’ Encampment (estimated in 1859) died in Victoria by the end of the smallpox epidemic, the city, by Rae’s time, must have visibly lacked the presence of northern Northwest Coast people.⁶⁰⁹ For the Haidas who returned to Haida Gwaii in the spring of 1862, their population “plummeted,” and it was reported that the disease continued to circulate in Haida villages over the course of a year, as villages were abandoned and re-consolidated.⁶¹⁰ Though Boyd states that there are no existing contemporary accounts from Haida Gwaii describing what happened after the return of Haida refugees to the islands, he notes a few Haida oral traditions that might refer to the epidemic.⁶¹¹ Looking at images of the James Hector collection together in 2014 at the Kay Centre in Skidegate, Captain Gold, noticing the collection’s 1861 date, observed that, “you get all these different carvers in the old days...that period of the 1860s, [which] is just before the bad smallpox. So a lot of the carvers that actually made these were probably gone, real quick, next year, the following year.”⁶¹²

⁶⁰⁸ *British Columbian* newspaper (New Westminster), citing the *Victoria Chronicle*, 11 June 1863. Cited in Boyd, *Coming of the Spirit of Pestilence*, 182.

⁶⁰⁹ Boyd (176-177) writes that a count was taken at the Northerners’ Encampment on 15 April 1859.

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁶¹¹ Boyd cites the “Cloud Watcher” story in Swanton (1905b:309-310), and also “The Story of Those-Born-at-Skedans” (Swanton, 1905b:86). *The Coming of the Spirit of Pestilence*, 193.

⁶¹² Captain Gold. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, 3 April 2014, Skidegate.

According to Brown, the 1862 smallpox epidemic “left few Haida alive and the argillite carving suffered accordingly.”⁶¹³

Through their work in British Columbia and the objects they took back with them, the histories of both Hector’s and Rae’s collections are entangled in the history of pre- and post- smallpox Victoria. This entanglement is a condition that lends biographical and historical depth to these collections, whose objects cannot be understood exclusively as souvenirs, curiosities, or items of “Native manufacture,” but as witnesses to the impact of colonialism on the Northwest Coast of North America.⁶¹⁴

4.6.2 *Colonial futures*

Rae spent his first full day in Victoria at its annual autumn Agricultural and Horticultural Society exhibition, held in the old fort yard of the HBC. The purpose of this exhibition was to display the “material wealth of the island.” Livestock, grain, produce and household goods were exhibited and prized at a banquet, which Rae attended.⁶¹⁵ Seated with the Mayor of Victoria and the Governor of Vancouver Island (Arthur Kennedy, who had replaced James Douglas at the latter’s retirement in spring

⁶¹³ Ian W. Brown, “Soft Gold: A Northwest Coast Exhibition at the Peabody Museum, Harvard University,” in *American Indian Art Magazine* 10 (4) (Autumn 1985): 24-29.

⁶¹⁴ Phillips and Steiner frame objects as “evidence”: “the materiality and physical presence of the object make it a uniquely persuasive witness to the existence of realities outside the compass of an individual’s or a community’s experience.” *Unpacking Culture*, 3.

⁶¹⁵ “Agricultural Show,” 30 September 1864. *The British Colonist*.

1864), a toast, “which had decidedly a political bearing,” was raised to Rae’s health, and to the success of the overland telegraph. Though he had not anticipated being asked to conduct the survey until ten days before setting out from England, Rae reported that the telegraph would be completed by 1866. When asked to name a suitable candidate for the survey, Rae had suggested James Hector, “who was a well-known explorer in these regions,” but that “the projectors had requested him to undertake it himself, and so he had come.”⁶¹⁶

In describing his journey from the Red River across the Plains and through the Rocky Mountains via the Tête Jaune Pass, Rae projected his positive vision of the telegraph, for which he was applauded at Victoria. His speech also promised the availability and suitability of land east of the Rockies for agriculture; from the Rockies and to the west, timber was abundant. Much progress had already been made with gold-rush wagon roads along the Fraser River, and 1200 miles of telegraph wire were on their way. In short, Rae’s speech emphasized progress and the growing connectedness between Vancouver Island, Canada and England, which would in essence collapse space and time and speed up communication with the colonial

⁶¹⁶ Ibid.

centre.⁶¹⁷ An editorial following this dinner expressed the advantages and urgency to complete the colonial telegraph, which would,

destroy effectually that isolation which now cuts us off from our Red River and Canadian fellow colonists. We shall no longer feel that we are the *ultima thule* of civilization and the ‘derelict of all nations’; but that we are part and parcel of a great colonial brotherhood – of a nation in embryo... With the union of the two [colonies] we shall then have a population sufficient to demand responsible government, and to form an integral part of that great British north American Confederacy which will thus stand, like the republican colossus to the south, with one foot planted on the shores of the Atlantic, and the other on the shores of the Pacific... it will shortly be in the power of the British race in North America to consolidate itself in one gigantic political partnership... Union in strength, and the sooner we form the Western link in a confederated chain the better for our own immediate prospects, and the better for British nationality...⁶¹⁸

Here we see the colonists’ ambitions for nationhood, built on their perception of themselves as a superior race, and motivated by the acquisition of political power.⁶¹⁹

Alongside these celebrations, Rae spent his brief time in Victoria productively.

He wrote Thomas Fraser, the HBC Secretary in London, shortly after his arrival in Victoria: “I propose taking a passage for England in the steamer that next arrives from San Francisco which is expected in 10 days in the mean time I shall occupy my time in computing my observations and in putting my route on a map for the inspection of the

⁶¹⁷ “Agricultural Show,” 30 September 1864. *The British Colonist*.

⁶¹⁸ “The Intercolonial Telegraph,” 1 October 1864, *The British Colonist*.

⁶¹⁹ Stocking has written about the relationship of ideas of race to nationhood, noting anthropologist E.B. Tylor’s “highest” racial category encompassed white Anglo-Saxons of the British Isles, whereas “beyond the British Isles there was a larger scale of otherness on which differences were marked in racial terms.” *Victorian Anthropology*, 235.

Governor and Committee.”⁶²⁰ The short time Rae spent in Victoria raises the question of the provenance of his artifact collection.

4.6.3 *Rae’s Northwest Coast collection*

Rae’s letters give some insight into his and his wife’s collecting during that trip. Prior to his departure, Rae wrote to Sir John Richardson, the Scottish naturalist and explorer with whom Rae traveled in search of Franklin’s ships in 1848-1849:

The survey will be a hurried one and will demand nearly my whole time and attention...My wife intends making a collection of plants and perhaps insects and it is just possible that she may cross the mountains if I find on reaching Red River that the time is too short for me to go and come back. My going right through and coming home by the Pacific, we could take it more easily. I am going to Professor Tennant’s today as you suggested, and may get a smattering [sic] of information from him – but I am the most stupid person possible about stones and shale. I have however Hector’s geology of the region and he quotes a good deal from your work...P.S. Katie says that she will reply soon to Lady Richardson’s kind note, and bids me say that she has no fear of being starved at Red River, but some idea that she may be eaten.⁶²¹

Admitting his lack of geological knowledge, Rae’s ignorance of shales may be one reason he collected only two pieces of argillite carving. Referring to Hector’s reports from the Palliser Expedition, Rae’s comments reveal the intellectual, professional and personal networks that, in addition to the development of colonial infrastructures, allowed for the circulation of objects and knowledge among mid-nineteenth century

⁶²⁰ John Rae to Thomas Fraser, 29 September 1864. E.15/13, HBCA.

⁶²¹ John Rae to John Richardson, 2 May 1864. MS 1503/68/11. Richardson/Voss Papers. Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge.

scientists (and their spouses). This extract also suggests that the collection of plants that Rae arranged to be shipped back from Red River may have been Mrs. Rae's. As Pearce has noted, women's nineteenth century collecting is an important but largely unreported area.⁶²² Also apparent in this passage with Rae's reference to Hector's work, is the collector's tendency to build upon the objects and knowledge of one's predecessors, and to act within one's intellectual and social tradition. This is not just characteristic of early to mid-nineteenth century British scientific collecting, but has been discussed by scholars of late-nineteenth and early twentieth century North American ethnographic collecting as well.⁶²³

In 1926 Rae's collection was transferred to the Royal Scottish Museum on long-term loan, where it was entered into the Annual Report and reconstituted upon its entry into the Museum as an important collection of specimens:

Another important loan to the department is that made by the Edinburgh University Court, consisting of a collection of Eskimo and North American Indian specimens formed by the late Dr. John Rae, the arctic explorer, and discoverer of the fate of the Franklin expedition.⁶²⁴

Rae's letter to Fraser indicates he spent ten days in or around Victoria, so it is clear he did not travel outside Vancouver Island to make his collection. While it is possible he

⁶²² Susan Pearce and Kenneth Arnold, *The Collector's Voice, Volume 2. Early Voices* (Aldershot, Burlington USA, Singapore, Sydney: Ashgate. 2000), xvii.

⁶²³ Laforet, "Objects and Knowledge," in Townsend-Gault et al, *Native Art of the Northwest Coast*.

⁶²⁴ [Unpublished manuscript] "Scottish Education Department. Report for the year 1926 on the Royal Scottish Museum by Alexander O. Curle, Director." 1926, 4.

acquired the argillite in Victoria, Mrs. Rae recalled that her husband used to “ask friends in different districts to look out for the kind of things he wanted in the Indian Country.” She remembered that Rae himself had collected the Inuit material, and that “all the Indian things he got himself [when] he was in British Columbia, but not on Queen Charlottes Island. Many of those curious Chinese looking things he collected when there,” she wrote, “and brought home with him, others were sent to him...”⁶²⁵ In her letters, Mrs. Rae attempted to classify the provenance of the objects in terms of Rae’s biography.

Among the objects in Rae’s collection from the northern Northwest Coast are four mountain goat horn spoons with handles carved with ancestral figures or crest designs, two tobacco pipes with metal bowls and inlaid with abalone shell, rattles, two grizzly bear headdresses, two argillite plates, a labret, a “war club,” an amulet, a wooden dish, and a model canoe. From the interior of British Columbia, Rae collected three axe heads, and from the mid-coast and Vancouver Island he acquired two model canoes and a model herring rake (which he made to demonstrate at lectures). The provenance information associated with several of these objects is based on Kate Rae’s “List of Dr John Rae’s Collection of Arctic and other curiosities” (1893) and on MacRitchie’s unpublished catalogue, which was based on Mrs. Rae’s list and Rae’s

⁶²⁵ Kate Rae to David MacRitchie, 12 June 1898. Rae 1.35, Department of World Cultures, NMS.

object labels. Titled “Red Indian Collection,” the catalogue ascribes a Haida origin to the argillite plates⁶²⁶ and raven rattle,⁶²⁷ a Skeena River provenance to the bone soul-catcher, ivory amulet and “medicine” rattle,⁶²⁸ a Stikine (“Stachnine”) River provenance to an inlaid eagle pipe, with a copper-lined bowl,⁶²⁹ and a Nass River provenance for the labret.⁶³⁰ The mountain goat horn spoons, though not ascribed a specific provenance, could be Tsimshian or Haida.⁶³¹ Museum records ascribe possible provenances to other pieces, such as a “possibly Tsimshian” shaman’s grizzly bear headdress.⁶³² Knowing that Rae did not travel to the northern Northwest Coast, where, or from whom, could he have acquired these pieces?

Records suggest that Rae requested contacts at Fort Simpson collect on his behalf. Hamilton Moffatt, then Chief Trader at Fort Simpson, wrote a letter to the HBC’s Board of Management in October 1865, almost a full year after Rae left Vancouver Island for England, stating, “I forward a box of curiosities to the address of

⁶²⁶ A.L.304.112; A.L.304.113.

⁶²⁷ A.L.304.97.

⁶²⁸ A.L.304.94; A.L.304.106; A.L.304.95

⁶²⁹ A.L.304.96.

⁶³⁰ A.L.304.98.

⁶³¹ Krmpotich notes that “all contemporary interpretations of historic Haida material culture provide examples of goat-horn spoons carved by Haidas,” though the horn itself would be gotten through trade with the Tsimshian. Krmpotich and Peers, *This is Our Life*, 196-197. These spoons are A.L.304.100-103, inclusive.

⁶³² A.L.304.125.

Dr. Rae which I have to request may be shipped to England by the first vessel, charging the freight to my account.”⁶³³ This collection was shipped in 1866.⁶³⁴

Another collection of plants from Alberta was apparently shipped to London at Rae’s request. Rae was clearly commissioning both natural history and human history collections on his travels for the telegraph survey, and as I suggested, the plant collection may have been his wife’s.⁶³⁵ Examining the Fort Simpson post entries for 1864 may give some insight into how Rae’s collection of northern Northwest Coast objects was made.

A Fort Simpson logbook entry for June 1865 records a brief visit made by Hamilton Moffatt and his wife to the Anglican lay missionary William Duncan at Metlakatla. As a few of the pieces in Rae’s collection are of possible Tsimshian origin (e.g. grizzly bear headdress, rattle), it is tempting to speculate whether they were acquired through Duncan at Metlakatla, who was responsible for assembling the collection acquired by Robert Dundas, an English chaplain who led an Anglican church in Victoria from 1860-1865.⁶³⁶ Duncan, who began his missionary career among the

⁶³³ Hamilton Moffatt to HBC Board of Management, 24 October 1865. E.243/18, HBCA.

⁶³⁴ A letter to Hamilton Moffatt from an official at Fort Victoria, 3 January 1866, stated, “The package addressed to Dr Rae, shall, as you direct, be shipped for London, in the homeward bound ship this season.” B.226/b/28, HBCA.

⁶³⁵ See Ibid.; William Christie to John Rae, 15 September 1864. E.15/13, HBCA.

⁶³⁶ In his introduction to the Dundas collection, Bill Holm writes that, “we do not know precisely from whom Duncan acquired these objects, [but] we do know that this material went from his hands to those

Tsimshian at Fort Simpson in 1857, moved his congregation to Metlakatla, an old Tsimshian village site, in 1862 (see Map 2). As smallpox raged along the coast that spring the relative isolation of Metlakatla prevented potential casualties among the Tsimshian converts – five people succumbed to smallpox there compared to the 250 who died at Fort Simpson.⁶³⁷ As Joanne MacDonald has noted, “Duncan developed a reputation as a dealer in curios, although unlike [Fort Simpson Methodist missionary Thomas] Crosby, [Duncan] did not become involved with institutional collecting. He dealt in small lots with individual clients, and found a ready market for curios among ship captains, visiting clergy and contacts in Victoria.”⁶³⁸ MacDonald notes that the first individuals to receive curios collected by Duncan were George Hills (the first Bishop of Columbia) and Dundas (Hills’s chaplain) both of whom arrived at Metlakatla in 1863 on the British ship *Grappler* to baptize Tsimshian converts.⁶³⁹ Duncan was also

of Dundas, who, when he completed his work in Victoria, B.C., shipped the objects to his family home in England.” D.G. Ellis and Steven C. Brown, *Tsimshian Treasures: The Remarkable Journey of the Dundas Collection* (Dundas, ON: Donald Ellis Gallery, 2007), 18. See also Alan L. Hoover’s essay, “The History of the Dundas Collection,” in *Tsimshian Treasures*, 46.

⁶³⁷ Ibid., 53.

⁶³⁸ Joanne MacDonald, “From ceremonial objects to curios: power exchange at Port Simpson and Metlakatla,” (MA diss., Carleton University, 1985), 114.

⁶³⁹ The *Grappler* was one of two British gunboats that enabled Victoria authorities’ removal of northern Northwest Coast people from their Cadboro Bay Camp on 11 May 1862. Boyd, *Coming of the Spirit of Pestilence*, 180. The commander of the *Grappler*, Lt. Edmund Hope Verney, also acquired Tsimshian objects from Fort Simpson. Hoover points out that, “a substantial portion of the Verney Collection was acquired by the British Museum.” *Tsimshian Treasures*, 50.

known to have shipped goods from the northern coast to Victoria, including furs, fish and “Indian curiosities” on a schooner he purchased to raise funds for his mission.⁶⁴⁰ Moffatt’s letter represents, as MacDonald points out, “the first known account of a shipment of curios from Port [Fort] Simpson,”⁶⁴¹ though she did not link the Scottish explorer John Rae’s identity to this collection in her thesis.⁶⁴²

In his analysis of the Robert Dundas collection of Tsimshian treasures (1863), Alan Hoover describes the “tangled chronicle of interaction between the Tsimshian people of British Columbia’s northern coast and the British Empire’s colonizing agencies,” of which the HBC played a part.⁶⁴³ MacDonald has argued that the Tsimshians’ surrender of regalia to missionaries such as Duncan functioned as a power exchange, which allowed them access to Euro-Canadian culture.⁶⁴⁴ As intermediaries between Indigenous people and God, and between European curio hunters and Indigenous people, missionaries worked to transform ceremonial objects into curios and ethnographic items for consumption in European culture.⁶⁴⁵ Whether or not Rae’s

⁶⁴⁰ Hoover, *Tsimshian Treasures*, 56.

⁶⁴¹ MacDonald, “Power exchange,” 163-164.

⁶⁴² It is also possible that Moffatt’s visit concerned the various troubles Duncan was causing the HBC. As W.F. Tolmie wrote in 1864, “Chief Trader Moffatt of Fort Simpson complains greatly of opposition in the Fur Trade from Mr Duncan, who is the head of the Indian Mission at Metlakatla, a few miles to the northward of our post...” Tolmie to Thomas Fraser, 4 March 1864. B.226/b/24, HBCA.

⁶⁴³ Hoover, “The Journey,” in *Tsimshian Treasures*, 41.

⁶⁴⁴ MacDonald, “Power exchange,” i.

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid.

collection is linked to Duncan's activities or to his Metlakatla mission, the character of the collection, which includes shamanic items, crest items, and objects of everyday use, indicates it was formed at a time of social and cultural change and upheaval for Indigenous peoples on the northern Northwest Coast. Furthermore, as Hoover has pointed out with reference to the Dundas collection, Victoria in the late 1850s and 60s was a hub for British church, navy, and society people who were interested in the material cultures of First Nations. For example, Sophia Cracroft, the niece of Sir John Franklin, recalled hearing about Haida argillite and silver carving in a conversation with Dundas at a Victoria dinner party in 1861:

It was altogether a very pleasant evening. I heard a good deal from Mr Dundas, of the remarkable skill and taste shown by the Indians in carving slate, which is found in the islands [Haida Gwaii] of very good quality, and in manufacturing bracelets and rings in silver and gold.⁶⁴⁶

Both Hector and Rae met with Victoria's elites during their visits in 1860 and 1864, and they may have benefitted from the knowledge, experience and connections of other British colonial collectors who were there at the same time.

⁶⁴⁶ Smith, 1974: 18, quoted in Carey, n.d.:6, quoted in Hoover, "The History of the Dundas Collection," in *Tsimshian Treasures*, 46.

4.6.4 *The argillite plates*

The plates pictured below are the only two argillite carvings in Rae's Northwest Coast collection.



Figure 26. Argillite plate

National Museum of Scotland

Collection of John Rae

A.L.304.112

26.4 cm x 3.5 cm

Photo by Kaitlin McCormick, courtesy of National Museums Scotland



Figure 27. Argillite plate

National Museum of Scotland

Collection of John Rae

A.L.304.113

20 cm x 2.7 cm

Photo by Kaitlin McCormick, courtesy of National Museums Scotland

The plate pictured in Figure 26 is an example of what scholars refer to as the “classic”

plate type, featuring “circular geometric elements interwoven with floral

components.”⁶⁴⁷ The second plate is freer in form and subject matter and features a

story from Haida oral history. Captain Gold explained the significance of this plate:

This is the Eagle capturing a salmon...[Eagle] controlled the salmon in the old days in some of those stories, and then in Raven Travelling [a Haida epic narrative], [Raven] tricked the eagle to get all of the salmon, and then he took the salmon from the eagle, and started populating the streams with the salmon, so he was giving the gift to the Haida people and the Tsimshian people, because

⁶⁴⁷ Macnair and Hoover, *The Magic Leaves* (1984), 62.

this eagle was around the Skeena [River] area. [Because Eagle] didn't like to share the salmon, he kept it to himself. So Raven took it upon himself to trick the eagle, so he could get the salmon, and then he started taking off with the lake full of the salmon...and then he started dumping them in streams as he was travelling, and that became the population of this salmon in all the streams and rivers. And then the rest of [the design] is all different types of plants, and what you can call space fillers. That's what that is in here in your picture. And they're nice illustrations of the salmon, three, four of them, he's got in his talons.⁶⁴⁸

Captain Gold's statement enfolds this object into Haida time as representing a creation story in the past before memory. It is also aesthetic evidence of Haida carving

conventions, as Captain Gold identified the plant elements as design "space fillers." For

Kate Rae, these objects represented her husband's biography:

Dr Rae was as clear as possible himself as to where the things he got came from, and that is why I was careful to send them as he left them... These plates are made of a stone that is when first exposed, quite soft [though when] they are carved [they] become hard after exposure[;] they are made by the natives of Queen Charlottes Island, they carve everything they use in wood and stone, I was told this by a traveller to the Island. I have no wish to have this [comment] put in the catalogue but in case the plates are not 'slate' would it not be better just to say 'two carved plates of stone.'⁶⁴⁹

Privileging her husband's knowledge over MacRitchie's (the Edinburgh antiquarian and cataloguer), Mrs. Rae enfolded these pieces into Rae's story, which illustrates the process by which Northwest Coast objects can be transformed into personal treasures. But if Rae was willing to have his collection be disposed of soon after his death, to whom were they most important?

⁶⁴⁸ Captain Gold. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, 3 April 2014, Skidegate.

⁶⁴⁹ Kate Rae, "Remarks on Catalogue," [no date, probably 1898]. Rae 1.36. Rae Archive, Department of World Cultures, NMS.

As Lidchi has pointed out, Rae organized his will so that the professional awards and gifts he received, such as the Founder's gold medal of the Royal Geographical Society, "were to be inherited by family, and the material encapsulations of his life as explorer and a man of science were to be deposited for the purposes of research and display."⁶⁵⁰ Kate Rae's correspondence shows her commitment over a period of years to have the collection made into a public record of Rae's biography and contributions to knowledge. This, writes Lidchi, "was an act of devotion and commemoration," as these things "spoke to Rae's precision as an observer [and to] his achievements as an explorer." Mrs. Rae's early correspondence "evidences her singular adherence to the self-imposed task of ensuring that Rae's collection should be properly curated so he could not be overlooked...she was invested in properly documenting Rae's legacy."⁶⁵¹

What kind of collector was Rae? Though primarily an explorer and, in the early stage of his career a fur trader, Rae had a medical background as a surgeon, but unlike Hector he was not otherwise formally trained in scientific disciplines of his day. He was however a member of the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) and was involved in

⁶⁵⁰ Lidchi, "Mild Hobbies," 2.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid.

contemporary debates on the exploration and geography of the HBC territories.⁶⁵² Rae is also known to have lectured at the RGS, using models to illustrate certain topics, such as a model herring rake he made to demonstrate fishing techniques of Native people of the Vancouver Island area.⁶⁵³

As Lidchi points out, Rae did make “official collections of economic geology, botany and zoology,” and these “specimens were documented (1850) and despatched during his lifetime to the Natural History Museum and to the Royal Botanic Gardens.”⁶⁵⁴ Though untrained, Rae was a man of science. Furthermore, though his movements across the land, his adoption of Indigenous technologies and respect for Native ways of life are qualities with which he is remembered and admired to the twentieth century mind, that Rae (like Hector) also supported the “‘civilizing’ influence of Europeans and missionaries is evident in his writings.”⁶⁵⁵

Rae’s collection is difficult to nail down. If we see it as a personal collection that reflected his movements through the land and interactions with Indigenous people, then the Northwest Coast portion sent from Fort Simpson does not fit his pattern of in-

⁶⁵² John Palliser, James Hector and Mr. Sullivan, “Latest Explorations in British North America,” *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 4 (5) (1859-1860), 232.

⁶⁵³ Lidchi, “Mild Hobbies,” 5-6. Lidchi notes that Rae “seemingly restricted his lecturing to the arctic,” so it is unclear whether Rae ever discussed this herring rake in a public setting.

⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

person collecting. Lidchi has suggested that “Rae’s relationship with objects was in some respects more fluid than we have often wished to imagine,” suggesting that the objects he collected during the 1860s phase of his career reflect his own biographical transition from explorer to traveler, “and so the collections may be describing things seen rather [than] known. They are mnemonics to place not experience.”⁶⁵⁶ Because Rae did not have a great deal of experience on the Northwest Coast, the ambivalence of this portion of the collection comes through the correspondence of his wife, whose anecdotal comments compensate for missing ethnographic data and provenance. Rae’s short time on the Northwest Coast is little-known and so are the stories of the objects he obtained from that place, which, though perhaps beyond the realm of his experience and knowledge, have also been overshadowed by his more closely documented Arctic travels.

4.7 Conclusion

Each of the four collectors discussed here acquired and donated works of argillite as part of broader collections of art and material culture from the Northwest Coast. Susan Pearce observes that each society uses objects (as they do language) to construct their

⁶⁵⁶ Lidchi, “Mild Hobbies,” 6-7.

social lives.⁶⁵⁷ The social lives of Scottish contemporaries Robertson, Mitchell, Hector and Rae were entangled to varying degrees with those of Indigenous Northwest Coast peoples, and in some cases with each other, as with the professional links between Rae and Hector. Their collections reflect their involvement in nineteenth-century trade and exploration, work that led to, or directly contributed towards, the settlement and colonization of British Columbia.

I suggested that Colin Robertson's donation of Coast Salish and northern Northwest Coast works to the PLAS (partially organized through the fur trader James Murray Yale) (1833) was primarily an act of self-commemoration, given Robertson's contemporaries' descriptions of his love of arts and culture, and his attempts to cultivate a distinguished standing in fur trade and British middle-class society. William Mitchell, having left no other records or observations of his own, left a remarkable collection of argillite ship pipes, which was donated to the University of Aberdeen sometime before 1887. By all accounts, Mitchell was described as a likeable and nostalgic sailor and fur trader; his experiences up and down the Northwest Coast – and his notable role in the Haida-HBC gold mining fiasco in the early 1850s – suggests his

⁶⁵⁷ Susan Pearce, *On Collecting: An investigation into collecting in the European tradition* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 28-29.

collection commemorates the people and places where and with whom he shared his life over his long career with the HBC.

Hector's donation to the Industrial Museum in Edinburgh (1861) reflects his geological and natural history work and interests. He likely donated his collection of argillite and other First Nations works in response to the museum's "personal application to...donors," received as they were, as "interesting specimens of the manufactures of the Blackfoot and other Indians of the northwest coast of North America."⁶⁵⁸ The timing of Hector's donation was opportune, as he departed for New Zealand in 1862 as the new museum actively expanded its collections by seeking donations from Scottish travelers and explorers, trade company officials and missionaries. Hector's 1861 collection was less personal than Mitchell's. Hector's subsequent donations of natural history specimens to the museum in Edinburgh suggest that his relationship with the museum was professional and revolved around his role as a source of scientific specimens. When Hector was Director of the Government Survey of New Zealand, he sent, for example, a "valuable and important contribution" of birds from New Zealand, "several of them being new to science."⁶⁵⁹

⁶⁵⁸ Industrial Museum of Scotland, *Annual Report* (1862), 177.

⁶⁵⁹ "Report on the Condition and Progress of the Edinburgh Museum of Science and Art," 1869, 3.

As a contributor to knowledge of Canadian geography, mapping and communications, it is possible that John Rae collected for similar scientific reasons as Hector. Rae may have collected the Northwest Coast objects to complete his collection, which included Inuit and other First Nations ethnographic and archaeological objects from his travels in the eastern, central, western and Arctic regions of Canada.

All of these stories are limited by the lack of factual details, inevitable in many cases of historical collections assembled before the time of professional collecting.⁶⁶⁰ As Kopytoff has pointed out on a more theoretical register, the social lives of objects, like people, are partial. This is certainly the case with collections originating from the Northwest Coast in the mid-nineteenth century.⁶⁶¹ Each object, as Pearce has observed, begins its life outside a collection. Though it is possible in some cases to trace an object's biography through its creation, general circulation, collection, and entry into a museum, "the life story of an object may not run as smoothly as this, for the great majority of objects, as of people, it does not."⁶⁶² In line with this incompleteness of object histories, Stewart has identified a central problem with the "collection," which, as I will show in Chapter 5, resonates with contemporary members of originating

⁶⁶⁰ Jacknis, "From Explorers to Ethnographers," in *Native Art of the Northwest Coast*, 46-91.

⁶⁶¹ Bill Holm observes that, "most of the objects from this region that survive today have little or no real documentation establishing their place of origin or when they were made." From, "An Introduction to the [Dundas] Collection," *Tsimshian Treasures*, 16.

⁶⁶² Pearce, "Introduction," in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, 2.

communities – such as the artists and learners of Haida art and history with whom I spoke on Haida Gwaii in 2014.⁶⁶³ This problem, Stewart writes, is “the replacement of the narrative of production by the narrative of the collection, the replacement of the narrative of history with the narrative of the individual subject – that is, the collector himself.”⁶⁶⁴ In other words, the museum collection often privileges, or is seen to privilege, the life stories of the collectors over those of the objects’ makers, a process that speaks to the personal aspect to collecting noted earlier in this chapter.⁶⁶⁵

This chapter has told the story of these collections from perspectives drawn from the European tradition, and as such participates in the substitution of narratives identified by Stewart. Still, as Pearce and Phillips and Steiner have remarked, objects’ materiality is their link to past time. “Like ourselves but unlike words...objects have a brutally physical existence, each occupying its own place in time and space.” Unlike words, objects “always retain an intrinsic link with the original context from which they came because they are always stuff of its stuff no matter how much they may be repeatedly reinterpreted.”⁶⁶⁶ Like language, objects carry their own meanings in their

⁶⁶³ The term “originating communities” in the Haida context is problematic because as I noted earlier in this chapter, the 1862 smallpox epidemic began a process of village abandonment and consolidation, which eventually resulted in the two main Haida communities of Skidegate and Old Massett.

⁶⁶⁴ Stewart, “Objects of desire,” in Pearce, *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, 256.

⁶⁶⁵ Baudrillard, “The System of Collecting,” 7-24.

⁶⁶⁶ Pearce, *On Collecting*, 14.

own societies. As the meanings of these objects have been explored here in the European tradition, these objects' meanings in contemporary Haida society will be the focus of Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Made for trade but inalienably Haida: value and ownership of argillite carving

5.1 Introduction

As argillite carvings traveled with other kinds of objects during the mid-nineteenth century along fur trade routes, through trading posts and across oceans they were reconstituted as objects of curiosity, souvenir and science and through the twentieth century as objects of craft and art. Originally circulated as commodities, they now rest in Scottish museums; their stories are not over, nor have they ceased to be “wrapped” with new and complex meanings. This chapter examines the ways in which argillite, which was originally made to be traded and sold to non-Haidas, can be re-enfolded into contemporary Haida narratives and conceptualized as an “inalienable commodity,” or object originally destined for the marketplace, but which retains an inalienable link to the people from whom it originated. In order to gather this data, I spent six weeks in the Spring of 2014 in Vancouver and on Haida Gwaii, where I met Haida artists, community members and experts who shared with me their perspectives on argillite as a material and art practice, and as an embodiment of Haida history and knowledge. The arguments put forth below draw from my interviews and interactions with Haida interlocutors.

This chapter makes two main arguments. The first, supported by recent literature in material culture studies, proposes that raw argillite is Haida patrimony. This argument is illustrated through Haida carvers' accounts of their relationship to this material and to the Slatechuck quarry where they extract the argillite. The second argument, also supported by perspectives drawn from fieldwork interviews with Haida artists and experts, proposes that though argillite carvings are the exchangeable, alienable products of this patrimony, the position of Haida people today to *historical* carvings circulated as commodities, and now in public collections, has changed. Today, Haidas relate to these objects from a position of loss, and value them for their potential to reveal missing links to Haida family, social and cultural heritage.

Haida perspectives on the value and meaning of argillite carving are presented throughout this discussion. Its association with Haida land use and narrative are two themes through which argillite as an inalienable material is claimed. In my fieldwork interactions I also investigated artists' and community members' views on the value of historical carvings in museum collections, which I showed to individuals and audiences in Vancouver, Skidegate and Old Massett using digital photographs. My approach in fieldwork interviews, presentations and other interactions, and the problematics and dynamics that developed over the course of this research are discussed below. I conclude this chapter with some comments on the character of

relationships around these objects today, showing how they illuminate the entanglement of museums and Indigenous source communities, parties that co-produce meanings, knowledge and value around the objects, which are “consonant [and in] competition with [each] other,” but that “can never be quite the same as those perceived by the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who contributed to the development of the collections.”⁶⁶⁷

5.2 *Inalienable commodities*

How and in what ways do Haidas own argillite carvings? The perspectives I gathered in British Columbia described the historical and ongoing use of this material to tell Haida history and stories, and, for those who have had the opportunity to access historical carvings in the world’s public collections, to rediscover them. The material itself, through which such stories are embodied, is exclusively Haida. The right to access the quarry site, extract the material and sell the artwork are Haida prerogatives protected by Haida and Canadian law.⁶⁶⁸ Anthropologist Solen Roth has pointed out that many materials such as pipestone or baleen are associated with, and restricted for the use of particular cultural groups, yet still easily circulate as raw materials in the

⁶⁶⁷ Laforet, “Objects and Knowledge,” in *Native Art of the Northwest Coast*, 137.

⁶⁶⁸ Solen Roth, “Argillite, faux-argillite and black plastic: The political economy of simulating a quintessential Haida substance,” *Journal of Material Culture* 20 (3) (2015), 301, 305.

marketplace. The exclusivity and relative inaccessibility of the argillite quarried at Slatechuck Mountain however makes it a “quite exceptional” material, “not only on the Northwest Coast, but arguably in the world as well.”⁶⁶⁹

The following discussion introduces the arguments put forth in this chapter by explaining the seemingly contradictory concept of inalienable commodities and how anthropologists have recently used it to understand how and why Indigenous people in other parts of the world commoditize materials and/or products that they consider cultural patrimony.⁶⁷⁰ “Inalienable commodities” was not a term that Haidas used to describe argillite during my fieldwork interactions on Haida Gwaii, so it is important to clarify that Haidas articulated their claims to the ownership of this material and carving tradition in various ways in my interviews and informal conversations with them. The right to quarry, carve and sell argillite, for example, is exclusively Haida. Still, this is a conceptual framework that elucidates the inalienable character of argillite carving – a contemporary status for this material that is a central finding of this thesis.

⁶⁶⁹ Roth, “Argillite, faux-argillite and black plastic,” 301.

⁶⁷⁰ “Cultural patrimony” has been defined as, “an object having ongoing historical, traditional, or cultural importance central to the Native American group or culture itself, rather than property owned by an individual Native American, and which, therefore, cannot be alienated, appropriated, or conveyed by any individual.” From “NAGPRA Glossary,” National NAGPRA, accessed 19 October 2015, <http://www.nps.gov/nagpra/TRAINING/GLOSSARY.HTM>

What does it mean for an object to be inalienable? As noted in the introduction to this thesis, through ethnographic research, anthropologists have classified inalienable objects as socially-constituted things that may be temporarily put into circulation by their makers but that must return to their original owner whose spirit they embody.⁶⁷¹ As Ferry points out however, anthropological boundaries defining the status of alienability/inalienability have been rethought in recent years, in part by challenging the rigidity of these theoretical categories. Ferry's study of a silver mining cooperative's production and circulation of silver in Guanajuato, Mexico, demonstrates that materials can be simultaneously exchangeable and inalienable. As I discuss below, her "inalienable commodities" framework has been used by other students of Northwest Coast art, and aptly describes contemporary Haidas' feelings about argillite the material, its source and the right to carve and sell it as works of Haida art.

For the Guanajuato mining cooperative, the language of patrimony is a framework within which silver can be understood as an inalienable commodity. Patrimony "entails the notion of collective, exclusive possession by a social group...such possessions are meant to remain within the control of the social group

⁶⁷¹ Mauss, *The Gift* (1954); Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions* (1992).

that lays claim to them.”⁶⁷² Ferry points out that though the miners do not own the silver deposits they work, but lease them from the Mexican government, they still retain control of the products and property of the cooperative, with the intention of handing them on to the descendants of current members. Cooperative members “often call on this notion of patrimony as ideally inalienable property to make claims over power and resources, even as they treat the silver from the mines and other products as commodities to be exchanged on the global market.”⁶⁷³ Though there is to my knowledge no argillite carvers’ cooperative, Haida artists exert collective ownership and control over the Slatechuck site, which is protected by Haida law and by Canadian law. Slatechuck was designated a federal reserve of the Skidegate band in 1941, and its “access and use, for all intents and purposes, are exclusive to the Haida.”⁶⁷⁴ Though Haida interlocutors did not use the specific language of “patrimony” to describe their relationship with argillite and argillite carvings, the ways in which they articulated their ownership of the material and access to Slatechuck – as an exclusively Haida right – speaks to Ferry’s conception of patrimony, so from an analytical perspective

⁶⁷² Emma Elizabeth Ferry, “Inalienable Commodities: The Production and Circulation of Silver and Patrimony in a Mexican Mining Cooperative,” *Cultural Anthropology* 17 (3) (August 2002): 331.

⁶⁷³ *Ibid.*, 332.

⁶⁷⁴ Roth, “Argillite, faux-argillite and black plastic,” 301.

this is a useful term with which to make the case for argillite as an inalienable commodity.

Ferry also describes Mexican silver as a “quintessential substance” that is exclusively known through the local experience and knowledge of miners who work the material on a daily basis and who ““know the mine as if it were their own home.”” “Notions of silver as substance and place,” she observes, “enhance the sense of silver as inalienable possessions.”⁶⁷⁵ Parallels can be drawn between Haida carvers’ feelings about argillite carving and their relationship with this substance, and with Haida Gwaii, the “traditional and unceded territory of the Haida people.”⁶⁷⁶ For example, one reputable Vancouver-based artist who carves argillite and wood described the material as a connection to home. This artist described that working with argillite was like “holding a piece of home in your hands.” Argillite is a special material that “holds [his] heart,” and at which he works to attempt perfection to honour his teachers and mentors.⁶⁷⁷ Selling his work through Vancouver’s prestigious Native art galleries, he commented that the gallery owners respect the exclusivity of argillite as a Haida material and art form, and that keeping argillite for the use of Haidas only is ultimately important.

⁶⁷⁵ Ferry, “Inalienable Commodities,” 332.

⁶⁷⁶ Roth, “Argillite, faux-argillite and black plastic,” 300.

⁶⁷⁷ Anonymous interlocutor. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Vancouver, 20 March 2014.

Ferry's framework has been put to use by students of Northwest Coast art. Anthropologist Jennifer Kramer also characterizes Nuxalk artwork as inalienable commodity. One of Kramer's central conclusions in her book *Switchbacks* (2006) is that for the Nuxalk, a First Nation in Bella Coola, British Columbia, commodification is an "authenticating act," which "describes a dynamic process rather than an essential status."⁶⁷⁸ In other words, the art market is one regime of value that compels the continued production of Nuxalk art, and is an actor in the construction of its value for both Nuxalk and non-Nuxalk. According to Kramer, the Nuxalk view their art as national patrimony, a perspective that "relies on the idea that Nuxalk as a people can never be severed from their connection to their art." At the same time, it is the commodification process through which Nuxalk control their art (an act of self-determination), and through which they "gain a sense of their own value through outsider's valuation of their art." Commodification, therefore, can be an authenticating act, and it validates Nuxalk's patrimonial, inalienable claims to their art, because only they have the right to make and sell it.⁶⁷⁹

Roth's recent article, "Argillite, faux-argillite and black plastic: The political economy of simulating a quintessential Haida substance," (2015) is the most topical

⁶⁷⁸ Kramer, *Switchbacks*, 60.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid., 61.

application of this concept. Roth describes raw argillite as an inalienable possession in order to support her argument that makers and sellers of Northwest Coast “artware” – a term for commercialized imitation Indigenous art products – are “indebted to those who hold argillite as an ‘inalienable possession’ (Weiner 1992) and [who] have carefully guarded it from outside circulation in raw forms, namely the Haida.”⁶⁸⁰ As Kramer saw with the Nuxalk, Roth observes that it is the Haida who for over two centuries have created the value with which argillite carving is now associated, recognized and celebrated. Drawing from Ferry, Roth calls argillite a “quintessential substance,” a “form of wealth that, wherever it goes once it is removed from the land to be sold or carved, becomes the alienable, circulating, embodiment of a patrimony considered inalienable (Ferry 2002).”⁶⁸¹ These scholars’ contributions to understanding the seemingly paradoxical notion that things can be simultaneously exchangeable and inalienable are not only theoretically compelling, but they also form a framework to make sense of my interlocutors’ views on the meaning and value of this material for contemporary Haidas, discussed through the remainder of this chapter. Though argillite carvings have always been sold or traded (and in this sense

⁶⁸⁰ Roth, “Argillite, faux-argillite and black plastic,” 300.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid., 301.

are alienable), these objects that have traveled the globe and are found in the world's museums, are now in various ways considered Haida cultural property.

5.3 Purpose and methodology of fieldwork in British Columbia

When I proposed this research to my board examiners in 2012, my paper questioned how the Scottish argillite collections could deepen our understanding of the shared histories between First Peoples, Canada and Scotland.⁶⁸² Underpinning my question was a theoretical framework for tracing the social histories of objects, and the research intended to focus solely on intercultural interactions from the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the 1820s to 1860s, during which time the collections were made and transferred to the Scottish museums. I had proposed a fieldtrip to Haida Gwaii to seek Haidas' perspectives on the history of argillite carving, however that research was not originally intended to focus on the dynamics of contemporary carving. While the findings from my original research question and theoretical framework remain key empirical and conceptual threads through this thesis, my conversations with Haidas altered my understanding of argillite carving in ways that changed the trajectory of this research and its conclusions.

⁶⁸² Kaitlin McCormick, "Dynamic Exchanges: Scottish Museum Argillite Collections and the Relationships between Northwest Coast First Peoples and Scots," (Board Paper, University of Edinburgh, 2012), 6.

Not only did my interactions on Haida Gwaii illuminate how these objects are implicated in the continued entanglements between Haidas and Europeans, they also shed light on their status as cultural patrimony. This perspective challenged the assumptions underlying my original decision to study argillite carving, a strategy that I framed in terms of “the tradition’s distance from issues of cultural patrimony.”⁶⁸³ Over the course of my conversations with Haida artists and community members, I learned that this is only partially true, or that rather, it is more of a misconception based on static notions of patrimony and alienability/inalienability. In short, this fieldwork problematized and complicated some of my previous research questions and assumptions, as the following discussion, which describes the dynamics of my research in British Columbia, will demonstrate.

This research originally aimed to make three general contributions. The first, to contribute knowledge of these objects and collections to both the museums and originating communities, and the second, to use them as case studies to show how art made for trade could illuminate local and global exchange networks and colonial processes. Thirdly, it investigated how these objects could complicate and deepen our

⁶⁸³ According to Boast and Enote, the concept of cultural patrimony has expanded from the return of individuals or their remains to include the return of money or cultural artifacts to their originating nation. Robin Boast and Jim Enote, “Visual Repatriation: It Is Neither Virtual nor Repatriation,” in *Heritage in the Context of Globalization: Europe and the Americas*, ed. Peter F. Biel and Christopher Prescott (New York, Heidelberg, Dordrecht, London: Springer, 2013), 108.

understanding of the history and legacies of colonialism on the Northwest Coast. As such, I hypothesized that these objects functioned as souvenirs and as evidence of the personal experiences of carvers and collectors, and also more broadly as evidence of historical political, economic and social processes.

Though my research findings supported my original hypothesis (shown in Chapters 3 and 4), the ways in which my fieldwork in British Columbia challenged my assumptions were equally compelling. The legacy of historical anthropological and private collecting on the Northwest Coast is fraught, and as a result, museums and (settler) governments are implicated in ongoing negotiations regarding the repatriation of Indigenous patrimony.⁶⁸⁴ Admittedly, my decision to pursue this “commoditized” Haida art tradition was designed in part to avoid engaging in these issues. As my

⁶⁸⁴ The repatriation work undertaken at the Canadian Museum of History, for example, is guided by the federal *Museums Act* (1990) and by the recommendations of the “Task Force on First Peoples and Museums (1992). See the Canadian Museum of History’s “Repatriation Policy,” Canadian Museum of History, accessed 2 October 2015, <http://www.historymuseum.ca/about-us/corporation/about-the-corporation/repatriation-policy>. In the United States, repatriation is governed by the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) (1990), a federal law that “provides a process for museums and Federal agencies to return certain Native American cultural items – human remains, funerary objects, or objects of cultural patrimony – to lineal descendants, and culturally affiliated Indian tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations...All public and private museums that have received Federal funds, other than the Smithsonian Institution, are subject to NAGPRA.” See “What is NAGPRA,” National NAGPRA, accessed 2 October 2015, http://www.nps.gov/nagpra/FAQ/INDEX.HTM#What_is_NAGPRA? For histories of anthropological collecting on the Northwest Coast, see Cole, *Captured Heritage* (1985), and the chapters by Jacknis and Laforet in *Native Art of the Northwest Coast* (2013).

fieldwork interactions show, argillite carving, which does have an ongoing commodity status, still initiates conversations about cultural patrimony amongst Haidas. As shown above, objects made for trade can also elicit feelings of inalienability. Furthermore, a key finding of this research is that these objects originally exported as trade commodities in the mid-nineteenth century are now considered by the “descendants” of their makers to be displaced objects of Haida history and culture. Peoples’ attitudes towards the meaning and value of cultural objects change over time. Though these objects may or may not ever be requested in repatriation initiatives, Haidas demonstrated that they desire a connection to these historical objects in public collections in other ways. One way is through high-quality digital photographs or 3D imagery, technologies that in the absence of the actual objects can be used as tools to study historical carving.

Meeting Haida carvers, artists and community members complicated my preconceived views of argillite as a strictly alienable commodity. The reexamination of such categories has been undertaken by other students of Indigenous art and cultural production, and has broader theoretical implications and (perhaps will someday have) practical implications for repatriation. Still, my 2012 thesis proposal did predict some of my current findings, having noted that regarding “the concept of “keeping while giving” (Weiner 1992), it seems...that the paradox of the argillite tradition is the issue

of ownership: the material and imagery was commoditized, yet physical ownership of the quarry site, intellectual ownership of the art form and the freedom of representation was retained.”⁶⁸⁵ My conclusion to this chapter draws from Weiner’s insights, which, as Myers observes, focused “on the production of inalienability and on the strategies and work of keeping.”⁶⁸⁶

My time in B.C. (while brief) has revealed a number of tensions surrounding these objects: they are/were objects of agency and economic acumen but Haidas also now see them as displaced objects of loss and historical separation. Likewise, Haidas’ positions in relation to these objects have changed in the nearly two centuries since their production, collection, and transfer to museums. Argillite as material is inalienable cultural patrimony, and the objects themselves, though made to be owned by others, are viewed through a lens of cultural ownership, through, for example, the stories they can tell. Furthermore, the Euro-centric “souvenir” status in which they are often framed is in competition with the complex ways that Haidas see these objects.

This discussion describes the interactions, methods and general outcomes of the research I conducted in Vancouver and on Haida Gwaii in March and April 2014. Over the course of six weeks on the Northwest Coast, I interviewed Haida argillite

⁶⁸⁵ McCormick, “Dynamic Exchanges,” 36.

⁶⁸⁶ Myers, “Introduction,” *The Empire of Things*, 15.

carvers, experts and community members about their experiences with, and knowledge of, this medium and its history. I also held community slide presentations and distributed printed digital images of the carvings, which I compiled into booklets and gave to interlocutors.

My encounters with Haida people around these collections in interviews, discussions and at presentations were rich and rewarding. Still, given the legacy of colonial collecting and my own identity as a settler-Canadian presenting the museum side of the story, these interactions could also be tense. Framing these objects as Scottish museum collections, though not intended to exclude Haida history and agency, bothered some individuals for whom the carvings represent primarily Haida, and not shared Haida-European histories. Certainly my way of knowing these things, developed largely through my own museum and archival research, was challenged on Haida Gwaii. Indeed, the concept of “shared histories” is not universally appealing.⁶⁸⁷ Nor does the idea or method of “visual repatriation” appeal to those who desire the return and full transfer of title of objects of Haida cultural heritage, although images of the collections were welcome as carving references and for collections information.

⁶⁸⁷ On divergent concepts of history, see Hoover and Inglis, “Acquiring and Exhibiting a Nuu-chah-nulth Ceremonial Curtain,” quoted in Black, “Collaborations,” in *Native Art of the Northwest Coast*, 810.

5.3.1 Interviews

Over seven weeks in March and April 2014 I interviewed thirteen current or former argillite carvers and three local gift shop owners who sell argillite in the Haida and settler communities on Haida Gwaii. My purpose was to gather perspectives on issues in contemporary argillite carving and on the history of this tradition. Several artists work in this medium on a full or part-time basis, many of whom live in Skidegate or Old Massett, or off-island in Prince Rupert, Vancouver or on Vancouver Island.⁶⁸⁸ Through semi-structured interviews I asked a range of questions regarding the artists' own art practice, the experience of working in this material and how argillite carving fits into Haida history.⁶⁸⁹ While each interview elicited different responses in terms of artists' experiences making and selling their work, most shared their knowledge of the physical, social and cultural aspects of carving. I gave interlocutors a booklet including colour images of each argillite piece in the three Scottish museums, which I had photographed in museum stores over the course of my museum fieldwork in 2012-13. Most of my interactions with artists and others for this

⁶⁸⁸ Carol Sheehan's *Breathing Stone: Contemporary Haida Argillite Sculpture* (2008) focuses on fifteen contemporary argillite carvers, though my fieldwork inquiries indicate that there are additional carvers not represented in the book.

⁶⁸⁹ Monique Hennink, Inge Hutter and Ajay Bailey, *Qualitative Research* (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi and Singapore: Sage, 2011), 112-118.

thesis occurred in private interview contexts, and interlocutors agreed to oral informed consent.⁶⁹⁰

5.3.2 *Sharing images*

Prior to departing for fieldwork, I consulted with curators/keepers at the three Scottish museums regarding how I could represent images of the collections to the artists on the Northwest Coast. As I discuss below, each museum was open to me giving community presentations in order to make these collections known to Haidas. My decision to share image booklets was also reached in consultation with the museum curators. I printed and distributed around twenty copies of these booklets, though following the community presentations the interest in images from artists and community members exceeded the number of booklets I had on hand. I uploaded my digital research images of the Perth and Aberdeen collections onto the memory sticks

⁶⁹⁰ I returned a record of each interview to interlocutors. These consisted of either the transcript from taped conversations or my notes from unrecorded conversations. In follow-up emails I asked interlocutors whether if quoted, they preferred to be named or made anonymous in my thesis. I recorded the preferences for those 50% who replied, and those who did not reply (but who consented to being interviewed) are quoted as anonymous commentators in this thesis. For insights into the ethics of negotiating oral consent, see Jennifer Shannon, "Informed Consent: Documenting the Intersection of Bureaucratic Regulation and Ethnographic Practice," *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 30 (2) (November 2007): 229.

of some individuals in Skidegate and Old Massett with the permission of curators Neil Curtis and Mark Hall in Scotland.⁶⁹¹

These booklets were successfully received in some ways but suffered a number of shortcomings. As a tangible piece of information about these carvings now far from Haida Gwaii, the booklets were received with interest, and were given in exchange for carvers' and experts' time and knowledge.⁶⁹² They included the contact information for myself and for each of the three museums, web addresses to the museums' online catalogues and a map showing the location of each museum in Scotland. Intended also as a potential tool for carvers, their most obvious shortcoming was the poor quality of the object images, which I took in museum stores as research photos. Regarding the large model totem poles, which are challenging to photograph, one artist remarked that, "these [images] are bum!"⁶⁹³ Captain Gold commented that,

I'd like to have better pictures of those specimens to show any details. You can capture the details with better lighting and better background... You can turn around and make [better quality photos] quite available to a lot of the carvers themselves today... That's what you want [to do].⁶⁹⁴

In the absence of physical access to the carvings, making high-quality images available to carvers was repeatedly recommended throughout the research process.

⁶⁹¹ In consultation with Dr Henrietta Lidchi, Keeper of World Cultures at the NMS, it was decided that I connect community members requesting digital images of NMS's collections with Dr Lidchi directly.

⁶⁹² No interlocutor requested that I pay for interviews.

⁶⁹³ Anonymous interlocutor. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Skidegate, 6 April 2014.

⁶⁹⁴ Captain Gold. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Skidegate, April 2014.

Jason Alsop, a curator in training at the Haida Gwaii Museum, advised that such images would make an important contribution towards improving the accessibility of historical collections for artists who carve in this medium.⁶⁹⁵

Two interrelated methods used by museum ethnographers, researchers and source communities for the exchange and elicitation of knowledge around objects include “visual repatriation” and “photo-elicitation.” Drawing from Bell (2003) and Fienup-Riordan (2003), Dudding defines these methods as “the return of copies of photographic images, held in museum or institutional collections, to the original encounter site or people.”⁶⁹⁶ While Dudding notes that photo-elicitation can be used as a research tool to establish relationships and exchange knowledge between fieldworkers and source communities, visual repatriation is increasingly led by source communities and recognizes that the descendants of original sources are real stakeholders, indeed owners, of things in museum collections. It is also a method for

⁶⁹⁵ Jason Alsop. Conversation with Kaitlin McCormick, Skidegate, 9 April 2014.

⁶⁹⁶ Jocelyne Dudding, “Visual Repatriation and Photo-Elicitation: Recommendations on Principles and Practices for the Museum Worker,” *Journal of Museum Ethnography* 17 (2005): 218; See also J. Bell, “Looking to see: reflections on visual repatriation in the Purari Delta, Gulf Province, Papua New Guinea,” in *Museums and Source Communities*, ed. Peers and Brown, 111-122; Anne Fienup-Riordan, “Yup’ik elders in museums: fieldwork turned on its head,” in *Museums and Source Communities*, ed. Peers and Brown, 28-41.

revitalizing traditional knowledge.⁶⁹⁷ Though intended to circulate knowledge and facilitate exchange, I hesitate to describe the booklets in these terms for three reasons.

First, I did not presume that the booklets would be used to revitalize knowledge since argillite carving, having passed through various stylistic and formal iterations is an ongoing tradition spanning two centuries. Though carvers desired better quality images, their comments were orientated more towards examining details on old pieces, to look at and learn about historical carving styles and techniques. Secondly, by distributing images, I felt I was not so much returning anything as intending to make these collections better known and more accessible for carvers, which amounted to the sharing of data. Lastly, several carvers I met preferred to look through the images on their own time; I therefore did not pressure artists into explaining their interpretations of imagery and iconography during our conversations.

Recent criticism of the method of virtual repatriation supports my second point. As Boast and Enoté point out (2013), “though data sharing is taking place [in projects which call themselves “virtual repatriation”], there is no *restitution* or *repatriation*,” as defined by NAGPRA (the transfer of “physical custody of and legal interest in Native American cultural items to lineal descendants, culturally affiliated

⁶⁹⁷ Dudding, “Visual Repatriation,” 218.

Indian tribes, and Native Hawaiian organizations’’’).⁶⁹⁸ Two interlocutors told me that Haidas would “not be sold” the idea of virtual repatriation because images conveyed a limited amount of information about objects, and that ultimately, Haida carvings – argillite included – are not just images to Haidas.⁶⁹⁹ The experience of giving two community slide presentations suggests that though this kind of interaction is effective for communicating information about *collections*, as my interlocutors noted, images are limited tools for learning about three-dimensional sculptures.

5.3.3 *Community presentations*

On Haida Gwaii, I gave one presentation each in Skidegate (at the Haida Heritage Centre at Kay Llnagaay) and Old Massett (at Lucille Bell and Ken Rae’s Haida Rose Café). During these presentations, I showed images of the argillite at the Scottish museums, including the non-HBC collections, and discussed my research on the works’ collections histories. These presentations were intended to share information about the collections and hoped to elicit some commentary on the objects, and both drew a small crowd of mostly local carvers. At each venue, audience members spoke about the legacies of collecting and colonialism on the Northwest Coast. Comments included that historical collectors had looted Haida art from the

⁶⁹⁸ Boast and Enote, “Virtual Repatriation,” in *Heritage in the Context of Globalization*, 109.

⁶⁹⁹ Kaitlin McCormick, field notes. Haida Gwaii, 2 May 2015.

islands. Another audience member commented that he had attended the slide show to see whether any of his grandfather's work was represented in the Scottish collections (there was not). Strong feelings regarding the impact of colonialism on Haida families and communities were expressed at both presentations.

Although the images I showed represented objects that Haida artists made for trade to strangers through the nineteenth and early twentieth century, their ability to elicit commentary and feelings around issues of loss and separation were clearly articulated. Prior to visiting Haida Gwaii, I imagined that argillite carving would be spoken about primarily as a medium through which Haidas exercised creativity, cultural continuity and agency in the colonial situation – an argument that informs current scholarship on “modern” Northwest Coast art.⁷⁰⁰ I assumed that its commodity status distanced it from issues of cultural patrimony and feelings of loss. In actuality, I found that viewing the collections solely through the lens of commercial agency is a misconception of the various and complex ways these objects are understood today on

⁷⁰⁰ Commenting on the artistic and economic agency of Northwest Coast people through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, art historian Aldona Jonaitis observes that, “First Nations people have been...responding creatively to the conditions of colonialism for centuries and have not ‘lost’ their culture...First Nations people are ‘subjects’ [not ‘objects’] of modernity, who rather than being victims to its forces participate either on their own terms or with non-Natives in contemporary life.” Regarding how this creative agency is manifest in the artwork, Bunn-Marcuse notes that Haida art (such as argillite), which “incorporates Euro-American design influences,” must be “considered as an integral part of the full aesthetic expression of a modern artist of the late nineteenth century.” Both authors are quoted in *Charles Edenshaw*, 196-97; 175.

Haida Gwaii. Through conversations and interactions with Haida people in which I learned about what museum objects represent for Haidas now – they are often seen as displaced cultural heritage – I was able to sharpen my understanding of the ways that objects’ meanings are transformed through time and for different people.

As Elizabeth Edwards has pointed out, when researchers or museum professionals take photographs – in this case, photographs of objects – “back” to communities, communities may be “faced with what is known to them from their own ways of remembering, through the eyes of an outsider, with very different resonances.”⁷⁰¹ Edwards’ point about the subjectivity of sight and how ways of knowing and seeing relate to individual and collective life experiences speak to the tone of several interactions I had with Haida carvers during fieldwork on the Northwest Coast. My way of seeing these things was through an historical and academic lens and reflected my detachment from the social and family histories that carvers articulated in our conversations, some of which I discuss below. Furthermore, my framing of these objects as being parts of Scottish museum collections was problematic because it seemed to contribute further to the sense of the alienation of these objects from Haida Gwaii. I discuss this further in the conclusion to this chapter.

⁷⁰¹ Edwards, “Introduction” to “Part 2: Talking Visual Histories,” in *Museums and Source Communities*, 86.

Henrietta Lidchi has commented that the meanings of trade objects to their mid-nineteenth century makers is different for their descendants today, people who have worked hard over several decades to re-collect the material expressions of their culture, history and collective memory. It is “completely comprehensible,” that source community members today would feel “emotional reaction[s] to a museum’s possession of objects that were maybe formerly made for trade but [which] were made at a period where somehow that sense of loss wasn’t as keen.” Furthermore, even under the conditions of exchange, Lidchi commented, trade itself “is not necessarily on an equal basis.”⁷⁰² Haidas and other First Nations traded or sold different object types under a range of shifting contexts throughout the nineteenth century as the conditions of colonialism developed and took shape. Today however, the relationships around these objects are “about having access to things that are meaningful to [source communities]...and I think it’s sometimes difficult to appreciate that if that [loss] isn’t part of your psyche.”⁷⁰³ As Peers and Brown have observed, “for indigenous peoples, for whom the effects of colonisation have produced rapid and wrenching change, museum artefacts represent material heritage and incorporate the lives and knowledge of ancestors. They are also crucial bridges to the future.”⁷⁰⁴ For those whose way of

⁷⁰² Henrietta Lidchi. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Edinburgh, 2 March 2015.

⁷⁰³ Henrietta Lidchi. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Edinburgh, 2 March 2015.

⁷⁰⁴ Peers and Brown, eds., *Museums and Source Communities*, 5.

life has changed but whose identity is constructed from the knowledge of cultural history, artifacts “offer the possibility of recovering a broad range of cultural knowledge for use in the present and future.”⁷⁰⁵ As I will show through interlocutors’ comments on the value of historical argillite carvings, these objects, regardless of their original economic status, are seen to embody important cultural and historical knowledge for Haida people today.

5.4 *A material from Slatechuck Mountain*

In their book *Argillite: Art of the Haida* (1980), journalist Leslie Drew and carver Douglas Wilson described “Tllgadu,” Slatechuck Mountain, where Haidas quarry their argillite, as an exclusive location, protected for Haida use only. Slatechuck is a “semi-secret place, visited only by Haida carvers who quarry this slate that they alone know how to select,” and though “this prodigal stone has travelled around the world in the finished form of beautiful black carvings, most of their owners would be at a loss to pinpoint the source on a map.”⁷⁰⁶ Over my five weeks on Haida Gwaii, I came to understand that non-Haidas can access the site only as guests accompanied by Haida guides. As one gallery owner commented, the right to quarry there is for people “of Haida ancestry only, to go get the rock, but for educational purposes, they’ll take

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁶ Drew and Wilson, *Argillite, Art of the Haida*, 47.

someone up.”⁷⁰⁷ Though I spoke to many artists about their experiences quarrying the argillite, I did not reach Slatechuck myself during fieldwork on Haida Gwaii.⁷⁰⁸

As Peter Macnair has pointed out, Haidas have been using the quarry site since at least the 1820s. However,

...from their own legal view, proprietary rights extend into the past far beyond that date. However, it was only in 1941 that the quarry site of approximately 18 hectares was designated as an Indian Reserve...thus assuring access exclusively to the Haida. Control is vested in the Skidegate Band although they presently permit members of the Masset Band to gather the stone.⁷⁰⁹

As I pointed out in Chapter 3, the idea to reserve this source for the exclusive use of the Haida goes back to the early-1880s, when after years of colonial mining near Slatechuck, Scottish amateur ethnologist James Deans reported on Haidas’ “fear” that the slate quarries would be found profitable for coal mining, and that they had requested the quarry site be reserved to them.⁷¹⁰ Today, as Roth points out, non-Haidas’ access to this site is prohibited for a number of reasons. Access to and from the site is physically challenging, the return journey all the more so, since argillite seekers must make the most of their trip by packing down as much material as they

⁷⁰⁷ Anonymous interlocutor. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Masset/Old Massett, 18 April 2014.

⁷⁰⁸ A few carvers encouraged me to visit Slatechuck however due to time constraints I did not make the trip. Their accounts of this journey, featured below, describe the sourcing of argillite as an arduous task.

⁷⁰⁹ Macnair and Hoover, *The Magic Leaves* (1984), 11.

⁷¹⁰ Deans, “Reports on Queen Charlotte Islands” (1883).

can carry. In addition, the quarry site is legally regulated. It is “thus a commonly accepted understanding that ‘the argillite of Haida Gwaii is reserved for the sole use of Haida artists’ (Sheehan, 2008:20).”⁷¹¹

Despite this legal and moral protection, several carvers with whom I spoke in 2014 were concerned that non-authorized visitors were gaining access to Slatechuck and its resources. “I make it up maybe once or twice a year, and then...every time we go up it seems that there’s so much digging up, I don’t know where it’s all going, cause there’s only a handful of argillite carvers, so I guess people are selling it...”⁷¹²

Another artist, though confident that the argillite supply was not imperiled, worried about extraction of the material by non-Haidas. “It was only the Haidas [that] could go up there before, but now, everybody goes up there...I heard of people going up to get the argillite to sell, people in Vancouver and stuff like that...to artists, and even non-Haida artists. So something’s gotta be done about it soon, I guess, if it keeps continuing like that.”⁷¹³ This issue recently provoked a Facebook announcement on

behalf of the Skidegate Band Council, in whom control of the Reserve is vested:

“TLLGADUU (SLATECHUCK MOUNTAIN) – NOTICE TO ALL VISITORS.

Tllgadu (Slatechuck) mountain is an Indian Reserve managed by the Skidegate Band

⁷¹¹ Roth, “Argillite, faux-argillite and black plastic,” 301.

⁷¹² Greg Lightbown. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Vancouver, 28 March 2014.

⁷¹³ Alfie Collinson. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Skidegate, 7 April 2014.

Council. Please check-in with the Skidegate Band Council...before going to Tllgadu. ”⁷¹⁴ As I discuss below, trespassing on the reserve and other kinds of transgressions, including unauthorized carving and attempts to sell argillite, are not unheard-of stories on Haida Gwaii today.

As Macnair pointed out, Haidas’ proprietary rights to Slatechuck extend “far beyond” the 1820s. Though not all Haidas do it, argillite carving is actually part of a much longer history of land-based activities. Two experts, artist and local historian Captain Gold of Skidegate and artist and argillite master carver Christian White of Old Massett, described how argillite carving is an extension of Haidas’ ways of being on the land. Furthermore, fieldwork interactions showed how Haida cultural, historical and personal stories emerge through the sourcing and carving of this material.

According to Captain Gold:

Haida people I’m sure started this practice a long time ago, because they were quite familiar with the land and they moved all over the land all the time, and I’m very sure that argillite that is only in the neighbourhood of half an hour’s walk from the water’s edge into a valley, that [Slatechuck] source anyhow, that we know of, and the kind we use today for carving argillite...the Haida people were not confined to just beach alone. We were in the forest quite often, gathering medicine plants and gathering red cedar, walking over land trails, and so on. Because sometimes it’s easier to walk overland from the east coast to the

⁷¹⁴ Council of the Haida Nation. “Tllgadu (Slatechuck Mountain),” accessed 31 July 2015, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=806667556069812&id=307576689312237

west coast for instance, and when we had that argillite deposit, it was in our memories for a long time before this so-called 1830 beginning point.⁷¹⁵

Captain Gold's account frames argillite carving in Haida terms. Implicit in this statement is his challenge to a once-held assumption, promoted by Barbeau, that Slatechuck was originally discovered by Euro-American miners.⁷¹⁶ Christian White's account also speaks to how Haidas discovered and distributed argillite, and remarks upon how carving fits into a seasonal lifestyle that continues to be in sync with the rhythms of land-based activities on Haida Gwaii:

Of course the Haidas would go to fish at the different rivers, such as Slatechuck Creek...and they would explore the area too for suitable logs for building long houses, and canoes, also looking for medicine...and they would have a trail that would go down through Skidegate Inlet...and that's where they would go over and get the argillite. And so that's how they would supply the carvers from Massett, and earlier on, probably the ones from Kiusta, they would have probably had to make the trip all the way around to Skidegate Inlet to get the argillite...we're a very seasonal people...we're used to moving with the seasons. So, that's what I feel the carving has enabled me to do, is to be able to move with the seasons.⁷¹⁷

Gold's and White's statements link back to Ferry's remarks on the Mexican silver as a "quintessential Guanajuatan substance" that is known only "through the local experience and knowledge of miners" who "know the mine as if it were their own

⁷¹⁵ Captain Gold. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Skidegate, 3 April 2014.

⁷¹⁶ Barbeau, *Haida Myths*, vii.

⁷¹⁷ Christian White. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Old Massett, 23 April 2014.

house.” Again, parallels can be drawn with argillite carvers, whose notions of this material “as substance and place” enhance its sense as an inalienable possession.⁷¹⁸

Getting to Slatechuck, quarrying the argillite and packing it back down is by all accounts a challenging but rewarding experience. When I met argillite master carver Alfie Collinson in April 2014 he had last traveled to Slatechuck in 2011 when he packed down enough argillite over a two-day period to supply three years’ carving. He had one chunk of raw argillite left from that load when we met at his studio in Skidegate. Collinson described the arduous journey to and from the quarry as a challenging trek, made more difficult by the need to carry the required tools to mine the argillite and then, along with the extracted raw argillite, carry it all back down again. As a young man, Collinson would accompany his uncle to pack down 150-160 pound pieces, at the same time negotiating the weight and bulk of the wedges, axes, saws and sledgehammers required to extract the material.

When you first start off down the hill, it’s kind of steep going down, then it levels out a bit, and you go through swamps, or you’re in deep mud sometimes, [if] you’re not careful you step off of the trail, you get into deep mud, you got your pack on, it’s real hard to get out of the mud again [laughs]. We put sticks, well, little branches down all the time on the trail so we don’t sink into the muck when we’re carrying, and then you’ve got to walk through the river with it, and then walk down along the river for most of the trek. You walk down along the river and then go up into the mountain at an angle to where the pit is, so, it’s...an hour and a half if you’re walking fast. And it’s about three hours coming out,

⁷¹⁸ Ferry, “Inalienable Commodities,” 332.

cause you've got to stop and rest all the time, and...some guys take too big of a piece with them, and they've got to stop and cut a piece off of it [laughs].⁷¹⁹

Despite its difficulty, Collinson and other artists make light of this journey, which is special by all accounts. Jaalen Edenshaw, a Masset-based artist who formerly carved argillite, described the experience: "Ah, it's fun. I think every time I come down, I swear I'll never do it again. It's a lot of work, but it's good to get up there...I like it, it's a good hike."⁷²⁰ Framed by one artist as a "gruelling pilgrimage,"⁷²¹ artists can also purchase raw argillite from others who make the trek for money, which is hard work that pays in a tough island economy. According to Edenshaw, though most carvers source the material themselves, "there's definitely people that'll just go up [to quarry argillite] for sales, which, once you've been up, the price [to buy it] isn't that bad if you think about all the expense just to get up there."⁷²²

Most of the carvers I met preferred to quarry their own material for their own needs. The late carver Carl Thompson of Old Massett explained that, "you gotta get it by yourself, the artists always have to get their own stuff, and know what they're looking for."⁷²³ Another Old Massett-based artist commented that:

I'd rather get my own stuff because I know what I need...a couple times I bought some argillite off people that did go up there, and it just didn't suit [my

⁷¹⁹ Alfie Collinson. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Skidegate, 7 April 2014.

⁷²⁰ Jaalen Edenshaw. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Masset, 28 April 2014.

⁷²¹ Anonymous interlocutor. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Masset/Old Massett, 30 April 2014.

⁷²² Jaalen Edenshaw. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Masset, 28 April 2014.

⁷²³ Carl Thompson. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Masset, 24 April 2014.

needs], and the grain in argillite is so unique, and that's how I carve is unique, one of a kind, and the guys that bring it down to sell it, they just take it off the top layers [of the stone]. When I get my own I like to work for it, and dig it out, and cut it – cut it to the weight that I can pack down.⁷²⁴

Artists described argillite as “dirty,” “dusty,” and “messy;” one artist emphasized that the work of carving is “a dirty job...call it glorified carving, that's what it is!”⁷²⁵ Still, many described it as “special,” “unique,” “forgiving,” and “from home.” Carvers' intimate relationship with this material and with the Slatechuck mine, known through intergenerational experience and knowledge, and protected for their use only, makes this material inalienable. Still, transgressions to this Haida patrimony occur.

In Masset, a local gift shop owner described two recent incidents in which unauthorized individuals had attempted to source and/or carve argillite.

There is a [white] lady here who just came on island, and she bought a piece of argillite off of one of the drunks, and she carved a nice-looking bear, so she came in here [to the shop] and said, ‘how much will you give me for it?’ [and] I said well, ‘where'd you get it?’ She said, ‘I carved it.’ I said, ‘you carved it?!,’ because [Haidas] don't want anybody carving argillite even, and I said, ‘you're not going to be able to sell that.’ She said, ‘well I figured I'd get a couple grand for it,’ [and] I said, ‘you aren't going to get anything for it.’...She might have sold it to a tourist...she did a pretty good job, but there's no way I would have touched it, you know...she didn't get it.⁷²⁶

As my interlocutor pointed out, though anyone having obtained argillite could carve it in the literal sense – perhaps even to a decent standard – the spurious character of this

⁷²⁴ Anonymous interlocutor. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Masset/Old Massett, 30 April 2014.

⁷²⁵ Greg Lightbown. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Vancouver, 28 March 2014.

⁷²⁶ Anonymous interlocutor. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Masset/Old Massett, 18 April 2014.

particular piece rendered it illegitimate, even “untouchable” for this non-Haida community member (who is involved in both the settler and Haida communities of Masset and Old Massett). As she pointed out, this settler woman had no right to access or carve the material, a prohibition well known in both Haida and settler communities. Furthermore, though she had carved a bear, a familiar image in Haida art and culture, being non-Haida she had no rights to this patrimony, no right to tell Haida stories and therefore, her work was deemed counterfeit.⁷²⁷

Another case involving unauthorized attempts to access Slatechuck involved a Haida man whose non-Haida partner suggested he quarry and sell raw argillite while on-island:

There was a guy, a Haida guy that came here...and he wasn't a carver and he was with this white woman, and they were broke, and so she sent him over here and told him, “you go get somebody to take you up to Slatechuck, and get some argillite and then we'll sell it. The raw stuff. Nobody'd take him up there. He hung around town, and hung around town, and nobody would take him up.”⁷²⁸

These two stories demonstrate that although the material is protected on Haida Gwaii, unauthorized access does occur, and word of such transgressions circulates in the communities where most people are aware of Slatechuck and argillite's exclusivity. As

⁷²⁷ As Nika Collison points out, “Haida oral histories are intellectual property, owned either individually or collectively, and cannot be used by others without permission of the owner.” See “In the Beginning: Haida Stories,” in *Raven Travelling*, 11 (f.n. 1).

⁷²⁸ Anonymous interlocutor. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Masset/Old Massett, 18 April 2014.

Roth has commented, “while *carved* argillite may have been initially made for outside consumption and as such is inalienable, the fact that *raw* argillite is sheltered from outsider access has helped maintain and reinforce its strong association – an exclusive one, even – with the Haida, who treat it like an inalienable possession.”⁷²⁹ Indeed, argillite’s exclusivity is known and respected further afield on the Northwest Coast art market. The Vancouver artist I interviewed described a similar story involving a person who attempted to sell a work carved from stolen argillite to a Vancouver gallery. According to this artist, the urban galleries recognize the integrity of Haida art and refuse to buy pieces that are known to have been carved from stolen argillite or that are known to have been produced by a non-Haida artist. Argillite is “protected by the more symbolic barrier that is the common understanding among the participants in the Northwest Coast art market that it is not for non-Haida to use, even once it has been quarried.”⁷³⁰

Likening his trips to Slatechuck as a “pilgrimage,” this Vancouver artist further reinforced the value of this material, which, as demonstrated through carvers’ accounts of the hard work required to get it, is substantiated by its being located in one unique

⁷²⁹ Roth, “Argillite, faux-argillite and black plastic,” 306.

⁷³⁰ Roth, “Argillite, faux-argillite and black plastic,” 305.

place.⁷³¹ Though the carvings themselves may be “prodigal” and “traveled,” their source is immovable. As Myers reminds us, the “classic form of the inalienable, from which Mauss derived the concept *immeuble*, was, after all, land – precisely an object that is not movable in itself.”⁷³² Haida curator Nika Collison has commented that it is Haidas’ “relationship to Haida Gwaii, to the natural and supernatural, that has brought each piece of Haida art into being.”⁷³³ Where the Slatechuck quarry and its resources are legally protected Haida patrimony, the following discussion focuses “more on the production of inalienability” around these objects made for trade (Weiner 1992).⁷³⁴ Though historical carvings were initially made as alienable commodities, their value as sources of historical and cultural knowledge, have prompted contemporary Haidas to want something of them back.

5.5 *The embodiment of narrative*

Tim Ingold has remarked that the properties of materials are not their attributes, but their histories. Ingold’s idea is used to describe the ways that material substances

⁷³¹ Anonymous interlocutor. Interview with Kaitlin McCormick, Vancouver, 23 March 2014.

⁷³² Myers, “Introduction,” in *The Empire of Things*, 15.

⁷³³ Nika Collison, “Everything Depends on Everything Else,” in *Raven Travelling: Two Centuries of Haida Art*, 68, by Augaitis, Bell, Collison, Collison, Davidson, Gijssen, Guujaaw, Jones, Macnair, Reid, Rorick, Yahgulanaas and Yeomans (Vancouver, Vancouver/Toronto, Seattle: Vancouver Art Gallery, Douglas & McIntyre, University of Washington Press, 2006).

⁷³⁴ Myers, “Introduction,” in *The Empire of Things*, 15.

(stone, for example) change through their involvement with their surroundings, to show that the “properties of materials...are not fixed attributes of matter but are processual and relational.” To “describe these properties,” he writes, “means telling their stories.”⁷³⁵ Carvers’ accounts of quarrying and carving argillite illustrate that both the physical and symbolic characteristics of this stone vary and change. This change is seen in the visible changes in the argillite’s physical form, and through the stories argillite tells during and after the process of carving it into art. Argillite, noted art historian Bill Holm, is wet when it is quarried, but splits if dried too quickly. For that reason, “the carvers protect their stock...by burying it or sealing the end grain with shellac.” Despite these brief changes in its material character, argillite might “become slightly more brittle upon drying, but the difference in hardness between fresh argillite and long dried – even century-long dried – argillite is practically undetectable.”⁷³⁶ As artists pointed out, argillite’s grain is not always uniform, so their work is often guided by the quality of the material at hand. As one Old Massett gallery owner explained, “it’s like the stone has a voice, the stone has an objective of what it wants to become.”⁷³⁷ Describing his carved boxes for example, artist Greg Lightbown said that he carves mostly stories, “and then whatever sees itself the best on the thing,”

⁷³⁵ Tim Ingold, “Materials against materiality,” *Archaeological Dialogues* 14 (1) (2007): 15, 1.

⁷³⁶ Bill Holm (1972:86), quoted in Sheehan, *Breathing Stone*, 21.

⁷³⁷ Anonymous interlocutor. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Old Massett, 18 April 2014.

a condition determined by the quality and character of the piece of argillite, as well as by the marketplace.⁷³⁸

What kinds of stories are told through these objects? There are many ways in which Haidas spoke to the narratives expressed through argillite carvings during my conversations with them, though only a few are represented here. When carving on commission for prestigious art galleries, wealthy patrons, and local gift shops or tourists, artists carve stories from Haida oral history and mythology, and sometimes episodes from their own lives as I illustrate below. From complex sculptures to tiny pendants or earrings, each piece is tied into some thread of Haida narrative, and different argillite types convey different kinds of stories.

Historically, as Cole pointed out, because of argillite's supposed "lack of indigenous authenticity," it was "more a passion of private collectors than of ethnological collectors."⁷³⁹ Still, certain late-nineteenth century scientific collectors did see some ethnological value in works such as model argillite totem poles, including the geologist George M. Dawson, who recognized certain types of argillite carving to be sources for information and stories documenting Haida village histories:

⁷³⁸ Greg Lightbown. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Vancouver, 28 March 2014.

⁷³⁹ Cole, *Captured Heritage*, 293.

The carved stone models of posts made by Skidegate Haidas from the rock of Slate Chuck Creek are generally good representations of the *kexen* [house totem poles]...plates, flutes and other carvings, made from the same stone, though evincing in their manufacture some skill and ingenuity, have been produced merely by the demand for such things as curiosities by whites.⁷⁴⁰

Though historical ethnographic collectors found argillite's role as a commodity problematic, I found that contemporary Haida carvers see this history as empowering.

As one person commented during my Skidegate presentation, "our great-grandparents used to sell this stuff for seven dollars, now we sell it for forty grand."⁷⁴¹ Many openly discussed the prices their work commanded in local (i.e. tourist trade) markets and in the mainland galleries. As Roth observes, "since argillite carvings have been commodities since the very start, their commodification is generally a non-issue."⁷⁴²

Commenting on the character of the smaller, "trade" pieces regularly sold at a Skidegate gift shop, the shop's manager described these as being based on "a lot of traditional designs" such as eagles, ravens, the wolf and sea-wolf, killerwhales and hummingbirds, often "things that are sellable *but [that] have a Haida story*, or a myth or a legend behind them..."⁷⁴³ [my emphasis]. In a similar tone but referring to the historical pieces such as those in the Scottish museum collections, Reg Davidson commented that argillite "might have been made for sale, *but...it carried our art till*

⁷⁴⁰ Dawson, "Report on the Queen Charlotte Islands, 1878," 149b.

⁷⁴¹ Kaitlin McCormick. Fieldwork notes, Skidegate, April 2014.

⁷⁴² Roth, "Argillite, faux-argillite and black plastic," 310.

⁷⁴³ Anonymous Interlocutor. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Skidegate, 11 April 2014.

now [because we] were not able to do the big monumental poles and head pieces and stuff” for ceremonies and performances [my emphasis].⁷⁴⁴ While tourist or “commodity” pieces are valuable today as “little original pieces of art,” authenticated by the Haida stories they express,⁷⁴⁵ the historical pieces, also made for Euro-American others, as Davidson suggests, sustained and continued the Haida carving tradition and are understood today as documents of Haidas’ experiences with colonialism. Argillite is therefore valued as a material through which Haida stories can be manifested and told at cultural, historical and personal levels. As demonstrated below, my interactions with carvers and cultural experts on Haida Gwaii offer some insights into the narrative power of argillite carving.

When Dawson commented on the historical value of model poles, the raised wooden poles they represented had not yet been removed from Haida villages, and in fact, Dawson himself had witnessed a chief’s pole-raising at the village of Tanu in 1878.⁷⁴⁶ The argillite model poles he referred to in the passage above represented poles he had seen in the villages. As Macnair and Hoover suggest, it can be assumed that the majority of early model totem poles, beginning circa the late 1860s, and produced until around 1880 “are more or less miniature versions of extant house

⁷⁴⁴ Reg Davidson. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Old Massett, 25 April 2014.

⁷⁴⁵ Anonymous Interlocutor. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Skidegate, 11 April 2014.

⁷⁴⁶ MacDonald, *Haida Art*, 145.

frontal, memorial and perhaps inside house poles.”⁷⁴⁷ Looking at images of carvings in the Scottish collections, Captain Gold identified two large model poles in the collections of the University of Aberdeen as examples of the earlier types, and commented on the configuration of crest imagery they may illustrate, explaining that because no one knows the history of the individuals whose biographies they represent, their stories are unclear.⁷⁴⁸ “The practice of replicating real wooden poles,” as Macnair and Hoover explain, “continued well into the twentieth century but it appears that some carvers elected to produce either theoretical poles or poles whose figures assumed a narrative expression, illustrating episodes from myths not elaborated upon the real totem poles.”⁷⁴⁹ It was for the generation of carvers working into the twentieth century that photography became an “invaluable” source of information about historical poles, but for whom their histories were unknown due to their removal from the villages.

Though early argillite model poles were carved from memory, colonial photographs “became invaluable later when, after [the] 1900s, into the 1910s, 1920s and 30s...some of the argillite carvers started to just look at the pictures of these

⁷⁴⁷ Macnair and Hoover, *The Magic Leaves* (1984), 34, 113.

⁷⁴⁸ Captain Gold. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Skidegate, 3 April 2014. These objects are numbered ABDUA: 5567 and ABDUA: 5568.

⁷⁴⁹ Macnair and Hoover, *The Magic Leaves* (1984), 113.

wooden totem poles, and started to copy them.”⁷⁵⁰ Though some carvers born in the late nineteenth century “were able to tell some stories,” later generations “could recognize crest figures...but they could not tell you the story about how it all grouped together, cause the group together tells a story.” Those who copied wooden poles from photographs “didn’t know how to tell the story.”⁷⁵¹ As Blackman and Hall have pointed out,

...by the 1950s most of the few latter day carvers were too young to hold personal memories of traditional works of art and began to refer to visual documents of ethnographic art from their respective tribes. This was particularly true of the Haida whose primary artistic output at that time was argillite.⁷⁵²

One effect of colonialism, as Krmpotich explains, was to disconnect generations of Indigenous people from their cultural histories. The removal of totem poles from villages interrupted the continuity of community history.

Characterised as historic documents, poles can not be ‘read’ to discern the events they memorialise. History is ‘inscribed’ on poles through their material production, their raising and feasting, and the transmission of associated historical and social narratives. Commemoration through poles depends on a prior knowledge of what each crest and figure was intended to signify. History is at once inscribed on poles through their carving and is incorporated in individual memory through the retelling of the events associated with its raising...⁷⁵³

⁷⁵⁰ Captain Gold. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Skidegate, 3 April 2014.

⁷⁵¹ Ibid.

⁷⁵² Margaret B. Blackman and Edwin S. Hall, Jr., “The Afterimage & Image After: Visual Documents and the Renaissance in Northwest Coast Art,” *American Indian Art Magazine* 7 (2) (Spring 1982), 30-39.

⁷⁵³ Krmpotich, “Repatriation,” 155.

Nika Collison has likened the removal of poles from villages to the removal of libraries and archives.⁷⁵⁴ Even if the particular histories “inscribed” on early argillite model poles are no longer clear, contact with such historical objects can provide access to the material of Haida culture and history and make them useful, as Peers and Brown point out, not only as valuable points of connection to the past but as learning tools for future cultural production.⁷⁵⁵

Some carvers have compared other argillite types, like the European-influenced ship pipes this thesis investigated, to “chapters of a book.”⁷⁵⁶ Where Reg Davidson interpreted the ship pipes such as those in Mitchell’s collection as “poking fun” at the Europeans who supposedly discovered the Haidas, another carver commented that,

I don’t think [historical artists] were ever poking fun or anything like that, it’s just that they were introduced to money and after finding out about money they needed it to buy food, or cooking utensils...and it was just what they saw happening...what they carved is what they saw. Most of those ship pipes that I did see [in books]...I think mostly those things happened on the ship, and they carved what they saw.⁷⁵⁷

This artist’s partner, who also participated in our conversation, added that ship pipes are “like a story...a totem pole tells a story [and] that’s like what it was in the

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid., 149.

⁷⁵⁵ Peers and Brown, eds., *Museums and Source Communities*, 5.

⁷⁵⁶ Anonymous interlocutor. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Masset, 30 April 2014.

⁷⁵⁷ Anonymous interlocutor. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Masset, 30 April 2014.

[ship] panel pipes too, it kind of told a story of what they'd seen, or what they experienced.”⁷⁵⁸

Still others were sceptical of the authenticity of certain argillite works as Haida objects. Tom Greene, a friend and silver carver from Skidegate, questioned the supposedly Haida authorship of ship pipes like those in Mitchell's collection at the University of Aberdeen. What was there to stop Euro-North American sailors from “getting their hands on slate and spinning off Haida totem poles, plates, pipes and mimicking their own household stuff?...I do believe there were copiers back then [as] there still are today.”⁷⁵⁹ Whether Haidas wrap these as “Haida” objects, or whether they seek to define their identity against these old pieces, the objects are seen to be multivalent, and the medium of argillite continues to be carved for sale and passes through different regimes of value, from the local tourist trade to the Northwest Coast art market, or through private patronage.

Generally, artists noted how their artwork included their own crests, as well as other Haida crests. Others said that they carved local creatures such as the eagles and ravens that are ubiquitous on the islands, and that also represent the two moiety divisions of the Haida, in addition to being major crest figures. Some carve stories on

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁹ Tom Greene. Personal communication. 6 February 2015.

boxes that are known in the Haida repertoire, such as Greg Lightbown and his son Gryn White. Lightbown explained that he carves mostly stories, and then “whatever sees itself the best on the thing, in the markets...some galleries want you to send two Raven and Clamshells and you know, they’ll sell one real quick and they’ll have one on hand to put back out.”⁷⁶⁰ Lightbown’s comments suggest that commodification is a dynamic and complex process and that Haida art “moves fast” in galleries. As Roth notes, the Haida are “one of the better-known Indigenous people of the North American Pacific Northwest, in part thanks to the wide circulation and great praise of the work created by its artists.”⁷⁶¹ As such, the art market plays a significant role in determining the types of objects carvers produce, and the stories they tell.

Lightbown’s son Gryn White also carves episodes from stories onto his argillite boxes, an iteration that began to be seen around 1880, and which has been called a “showpiece of carving virtuosity.”⁷⁶² “There’s just so many crests and stories...so you would get a visual in your head and do your take on it, and it sort of

⁷⁶⁰ Greg Lightbown. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Vancouver, 28 March 2014. Lightbown’s reference to the Raven and the clamshell refers to an important episode in Haida mythology in which culture hero Raven discovers the first people in a clamshell.

⁷⁶¹ Roth, “Argillite, faux-argillite and black plastic,” 310.

⁷⁶² Drew and Wilson, *Argillite: Art of the Haida*, 229. See also Macnair and Hoover, *The Magic Leaves* (1984), 129.

translates into the story and your imagination.”⁷⁶³ As Wright has pointed out with respect to the historical pieces, each carving is original and reflects the carver’s artistic interpretation. Indeed, Lightbown remarked that, “they’re one-offs, right? They’re not mass-produced, so you’ve got to take all the time to finish your piece, and then sell it, [and] start again.”⁷⁶⁴

Alfie Collinson also carves boxes and Haida figures, and was working on a killer whale figure for one of his private collectors when we met at his studio. Collinson explained that he usually decides what he carves, and he referred to Barbeau’s books as sources for his study of historical poles and argillite carvings. In addition to Collinson, many carvers whom I met on Haida Gwaii owned well-thumbed copies of Barbeau’s books, smudged with black argillite dust, which had been passed down from older relatives for whom the books served as references for their own carving from the 1950s onward. Blackman and Hall have noted that, “the use of visual documents in the form of paintings, photographs and reproductions in books is not a recent phenomenon on the Northwest Coast, but rather a source to which Northwest Coast artists have turned for well over 100 years.”⁷⁶⁵

⁷⁶³ Gryn White. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Vancouver, 28 March 2014.

⁷⁶⁴ Greg Lightbown. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Vancouver, 28 March 2014.

⁷⁶⁵ Blackman and Hall, “The Afterimage & Image After,” 31.

For Collinson, as for other artists, the stories told through argillite may also be deeply personal. Collinson described a piece he carved to represent his father's fishing boat, which he himself had piloted, and which sunk some years earlier. Tragically, his father Dempsey Collinson, the former Chief Skidegate, passed away in the accident.

After the accident, the collector asked me if I'd carve that piece, and it took me about four years, it sat here for about four years before I finally completed it...I ran that boat for a few years. And when the accident happened, I had to tear the boat apart and burn it. [Including] the steering wheel there, off the boat. And a few other things. So yeah, it was kind of hard for a while to finish the project.⁷⁶⁶

Collinson's collector had been inspired by nineteenth-century argillite ship pipes and asked the artist to carve his late father's boat, which Collinson said would later be donated to a museum. Sadly, this collector passed away of an illness only ever having seen a photograph of the piece, the last that Collinson would make for him.

Collinson's discussion of his biography as an artist was inseparable from stories about his immediate family and childhood history, such as how he, along with several Skidegate children, were trained to carve by Collinson's uncle, Rufus Moody in the 1960s, with whom Collinson would quarry argillite as a young man. As such, argillite carvings, wherever and with whomever they end up, are entangled in complex family and social histories, those of the carver, but also, as I hope to have shown throughout

⁷⁶⁶ Alfie Collinson. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Skidegate, 7 April 2014.

this thesis, with those of the collectors as well. I will return to the concept of entanglement in the conclusion to this chapter.

Another carver for whom family history, biography and art practice are intertwined is Christian White, who fits his carving into a lifestyle guided by traditional land-based activities such as the fishing and the gathering of food and medicines. White carves around eight pieces per year in order to leave time for food gathering, singing and dancing, the latter of which he supports financially through his carving. These activities and adventures form part of a worldview that is deeply rooted in White's family's history on Haida Gwaii. Reflecting upon the adventures of his grandfather, White explained:

I realized that we [contemporaries] could have adventures [too], we could build on our own history, and become part of the history also. And so [in the artwork] I try to tie those things together, really, [with] all the stories I heard from my Grandfather, my great uncles, uncles, my father, and my peers, I guess. So, I try to bring it into our own context now, and like I said over the years I've had so many fishing adventures, hunting adventures, and even going in the woods looking for cedars, to see evidence of where our people gathered the cedars for canoes, for totem poles, houses, and just to feel in some areas like you're the first ones ever, or feel the presence of the people who have been there before...I've got to leave my mark in history, I guess.⁷⁶⁷

White's art is indivisible from his relationships with the land and through this, his predecessors. Such descriptions of the cultural, historical and social connectedness of

⁷⁶⁷ Christian White. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick. Old Massett, 23 April 2014.

argillite carving correlate with statements I gathered from other carvers, most of whom described their work in relation to their relatives, friends and teachers.

In Masset/Old Massett, most artists described carving in its social context and with reference to particular individuals. Jaalen Edenshaw described working in argillite as “a sort of social carving more than some of the wood when I sit alone and carve. When we were carving argillite we would go to my uncle’s or my cousin’s...carving, and you know, sharing stories.”⁷⁶⁸ Edenshaw and several others frequently described the Yeltatzie family, who worked together and with friends at their home in Old Massett, as a hub for carving and socializing in the 1970s. As Edenshaw noted, “[those] would have been neat times because they were carving in one house, and real neat things [were] coming out of [the 1960s and 70s], they were rediscovering the old art form, as well as being influenced by more modern things as well, but you know, it was sort of the era when the old form of Haida art was coming back.”⁷⁶⁹ In this interview extract, Edenshaw alluded to the 1960s and 70s, a period

⁷⁶⁸ Jaalen Edenshaw. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Masset, 28 April 2014.

⁷⁶⁹ Jaalen Edenshaw. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Masset, 28 April 2014. The Yeltatzie brothers are featured in photographer Ulli Steltzer’s *Indian Artists at Work* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1976), 26-31. See also Sheehan, *Breathing Stone*, in which the Yeltatzies are frequently cited as the source of contemporary carvers’ inspiration and mentorship.

recognized for its resurgence in contemporary Haida (and other Northwest Coast) art forms, and sometimes referred to as the “renaissance” period.⁷⁷⁰

The late carver Carl Thompson, too, began visiting the Yeltatzies at the age of fourteen or fifteen: “I always went to visit all the carvers, George Yeltatzie, Harold Yeltatzie, all the Yeltatzies, they used to have the big house on the hill, we used to all go there, just hang out and watch them carve all the time.”⁷⁷¹ Another artist credited the Yeltatzies for introducing him to the medium:

I just started hanging out with my friends, my cousins, and everybody knows the Yeltatzies, John, Harold, George, and I was hanging out with them and everybody was carving around the tables, and they asked me to do it too, so I picked up a piece [of argillite] and I just looked at it for days and days and I started working on it, cut it all back, and did an eagle, was my first carving. Haven’t looked back. That was 1976.⁷⁷²

Not all artists carve in groups. Still, Christian White, who works alone in his own studio, remembered the social bonds formed in the early stages of his career. White described moving to Victoria in the early 1980s:

I started to get into different galleries, gift shops. The way I looked at it was as a way to make a living, and I met with other carvers that lived in the city, and you know, we shared our carving areas and even though we had different styles within the Haida style, each family developed off into their own family style. And you know, we enjoyed each others’ company. When I was in Masset, me

⁷⁷⁰ See Aaron Glass, “History and Critique of the ‘Renaissance’ Discourse,” In *Native Art of the Northwest Coast*, 487-517.

⁷⁷¹ Carl Thompson. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Masset, 24 April 2015.

⁷⁷² Anonymous interlocutor. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick, Masset, 30 April 2014.

and my buddies the same age as me – we’d go and see the older fellas, they might be ten or more – ten or fifteen years older than us, and we’d go visit them, and then I’d notice the different family styles that were starting, and we were emulating a lot of their work, me and my friend Terry Yeltatzie, and Mike Brown, we were emulating other carvers’ work, and you know, other families of carvers, and we’d go and work with them on our own, here and there.⁷⁷³

Artists in Skidegate also shared stories of the social history of argillite carving and credited older contemporaries for stimulating work in this medium. Many carvers’ experience with argillite began under the mentorship of Rufus Moody (1923-1998), a prolific carver who taught many young Haida artists in the 1960s.⁷⁷⁴ Haida artist and silver carver Tom Greene remembered Moody as the first person to start a training program for argillite carving in Skidegate. Greene remembers carving small pendants under Moody’s direction and being taught how to fasten silver backings onto the argillite. Though Greene does not carve argillite today, he shared images of his early pieces (Figure 28) one of which strongly resembles an eagle pendant carved by Moody now in the collections of the Perth Museum (Figure 29):

⁷⁷³ Christian White. Interview by Kaitlin McCormick. Old Massett, 23 April 2014.

⁷⁷⁴ Sheehan, *Breathing Stone*, 130-133. Sheehan notes that Moody was a holder of the Order of Canada.



Figures 28 and 29. Pendants by Tom Greene (L) and Rufus Moody, PMAG (R)
 (L) Image courtesy of Tom Greene. (R) Photograph by Kaitlin McCormick, courtesy Perth & Kinross Council

Greene described his pendant as an example of,

...what Rufus Moody taught me to carve in his carving class. I think I might have been nine or ten, I was pretty young then, I just like to show what Rufus did for promoting younger people to get into carving Haida art...I like to give him credit because he did originally start me off. These sure are crude but I remember local loggers and fishermen ordering and buying stuff I made because I was so young then, and people like Claude Davidson and Morris White supporting us and encouraging us to continue on.⁷⁷⁵

These stories demonstrate how the argillite carving tradition is entangled in complex local social dynamics and histories and how the material functions as a medium

⁷⁷⁵ Tom Greene. Email to the author, 19 April 2014. Claude Davidson (1924-1951) was chief of the village of Dadens and was the father of artists Robert Davidson and Reg Davidson. Morris White was Chief Edenshaw and was the father of Christian White.

through which Haida cultural, historical and personal stories are told. Furthermore, artists' statements speak to the multiple regimes of value through which these objects travel and are given meaning, including the local tourist trade and wider Northwest Coast art markets, and the museums which hold historical carvings. What happens then when historical carvings become disconnected from the stories they originally told, when they become "wrapped" in new meanings and new stories? A few concluding comments speak to the mutable character of these "entangled" objects.

5.6 Conclusion

Though the history of argillite carvings as part of museum collections is the focus of this thesis, my fieldwork on Haida Gwaii revealed that this narrative is only partially true, or, that it is actually part of a larger and more complex story. My conversations with Haida artists, experts and community members revealed that argillite as raw material is patrimony, and that the rights to quarry, carve and circulate it are exclusively Haida. As I have shown, these insights are supported by recent anthropological literature.⁷⁷⁶

My fieldwork methods on Haida Gwaii, which included presentations, interviews and the sharing of artifact images, generated another finding: that historical

⁷⁷⁶ Ferry, "Inalienable Commodities" (2002); Kramer, *Switchbacks* (2006); Roth, "Argillite, faux-argillite and black plastic" (2015).

argillite carvings, now in the possession of museums, are also considered Haida property, even though they were originally made for trade or for sale. Because of their original alienability, they do not fit conventional definitions of patrimony. According to NAGPRA, inalienable objects “shall have been considered inalienable” by Native groups “at the time the object was separated from such [groups].”⁷⁷⁷ Still as Lidchi pointed out, Indigenous source communities’ attitudes towards objects of their material heritage have changed over time. As Laforet has observed, the meanings and value of objects in museum collections “can never be quite the same as those perceived by the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who contributed to the development of the collections.”⁷⁷⁸ My fieldwork interactions showed that “wrapping” these objects as museum collections – in my public slideshow presentations for example – was problematic and in competition with Haida knowledge, which framed the objects not in terms of their museum careers, but in light of their connections to Haida social and family histories. “It’s funny to hear you interpret these pieces,” said one Old Massett artist after my slideshow in that community, “because we see them in such a different way, these are our peoples’ histories, our ancestors.”⁷⁷⁹ These former

⁷⁷⁷ “Cultural Patrimony,” NAGPRA Glossary, accessed 21 October 2015, <http://www.nps.gov/nagpra/TRAINING/GLOSSARY.HTM>

⁷⁷⁸ Laforet, “Objects and Knowledge,” in *Native Art of the Northwest Coast*, 137.

⁷⁷⁹ Anonymous interlocutor. Comments made to the author, Old Massett, 2 May 2014.

commodities, reframed by contemporary Haidas as objects of cultural patrimony, can be seen here in Weiner's terms to have been, in a sense, reproduced as inalienable possessions.

The different ways of knowing and laying claim to these objects are ongoing among the descendants of those who originated the collections. Jaalen Edenshaw described the tension between Haida and museum understandings and claims to the ownership of cultural objects when he visited UK museums in 2009:

For us carvers and learners...when we were in England, we were looking at these [Haida pieces] and we'd hear [museum staff] be like, 'our collections,' and then we were like, 'wait a minute, these are our collections,' you know, it's sort of a different [view], but you know, I feel trips like [2009's Haida Project] and having exposure [to collections] really helps an artist to develop and there's lots to learn from both sides, I guess. So, I think it's really handy to have experiences like that and I would encourage [museum visits] to happen more.⁷⁸⁰

My fieldwork interactions on the Northwest Coast suggest that Haidas desire an ongoing connection to the entire range of their material cultural heritage in the world's museums. Whether access is facilitated through data sharing, visits to museum collections or through the return of cultural property, the complex processes of negotiation around these objects reflect their ongoing entanglement in relationships between Indigenous source communities and museums, those for whom the legacies of these collections are most potent.

⁷⁸⁰ Jaalen Edenshaw. Interview with Kaitlin McCormick, Masset, 28 April 2014.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.1 Dynamic Exchanges: objects and the relationships between Northwest Coast First Peoples and Scots

This thesis has examined four collections of Haida argillite carving assembled by Scottish men who were employed by, or affiliated with, the Hudson's Bay Company on the Northwest Coast of North America in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. The approximately thirty argillite carvings collected by Colin Robertson and William Mitchell, James Hector and John Rae form part of broader Northwest Coast collections now in the possession of the National Museums Scotland, the University of Aberdeen Museums and the Perth Museum and Art Gallery. Originally deployed by their Haida makers as commodities in the Northwest Coast fur trade, these objects were collected as curiosities, souvenirs and specimens and, upon their entry into Scottish museums, were recontextualized, reframed and revaluated through the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries as objects of ethnography, industrial art and craft and fine art.

By identifying the times and places at which the Scottish argillite collections were assembled, the thesis shed light on the dynamics of nineteenth century Scottish collecting on the Northwest Coast and its legacies. The argillite carvings that

circulated and were collected from the 1820s to 60s, especially the ship panel pipes detailed in various chapters, reflected the ambivalent and hybrid character of intercultural exchange during these decades. By identifying the places where these objects were most likely traded and the individuals responsible for their circulation, this thesis has also contributed to our understanding of the workings of this trade, and opens the field for new questions into the character of British-Indigenous exchange on the Northwest Coast of Canada.

To date, the art historical and anthropological scholarship on argillite carving has been mainly geared towards tracing its stylistic developments and identifying the work of particular historical artists (Drew and Wilson 1981; Kaufmann 1969; Macnair and Hoover 1984, 2002; Sheehan 1981; Wright 1977, 1979, 1980, 1982, 1985, 1986, 2001). These scholars have established art historical categories in order to better understand trends in argillite carving types and their approximate historical periods. Drawing on this scholarship, this thesis established new insights into the changing statuses of these types of objects as they have moved through various regimes of value. This was a novel theoretical approach to the study of the trajectories of argillite carvings.

To track the social lives of these carvings and their changing statuses for collectors, museums and Indigenous source communities, this study drew on

anthropological contributions towards understanding the movement and revaluation of objects in various historical and contemporary societies (Appadurai and Kopytoff 1986; Clifford 1988, 1997; Myers 2001; Thomas 1991; Weiner 1992). Tracing the collections from their processes of circulation, collection, display and contemporary re-engagement with Indigenous source communities has gleaned a number of findings in support of my central thesis: that the meanings and value of these objects are historically contingent.

6.2 Cultures of display in Scottish museums

Having begun this research in Scottish museum stores, I introduced the collections through their histories of museum interpretation and exhibition in the UK. In foregrounding the ways these objects have been and are valued by their current owners, Chapter 2 alluded to issues raised in Chapter 5, namely, the ways that objects of historical Haida material culture are understood as cultural patrimony in Haida communities.

The museum careers of these objects were traced through the various records available at each institution, including acquisition ledgers, catalogues and catalogue cards, museum guides and annual reports, and through interviews with curators. Though forming a complete record of the exhibition of these objects was beyond the scope of this thesis (and in the case of the Perth Museum, which lacks historical

exhibition records, it was not possible), Chapter 2 outlined various historical modes of interpretation as a backdrop against which contemporary displays could be understood.

The National Museum of Scotland has most recently interpreted these argillite collections as examples of the diverse and ongoing carving traditions of the Northwest Coast. They are also presented as evidence of Haida peoples' ongoing engagements with local and global economies, such as the Northwest Coast potlatch and the art market. The display strategies of *Artistic Legacies* and *Living Lands* – showcasing the cultural continuities of Indigenous traditions – were shown to contrast with historical modes of interpretation at Scotland's national museum. Nineteenth and early twentieth century ways of understanding the objects of "others" reflected then-held assumptions about the impending disappearance of Indigenous people and their presumed inferiority on the evolutionary scale, two views which anthropologists discredited decades ago.

In Aberdeen meanwhile, the University Museum has critically interrogated the legacies of its collections since the mid-1980s through the work of its first professional curator, Charles Hunt, whose exhibitions reflected his engagement in the "new museology."⁷⁸¹ The Museum's efforts to understand the legacies of colonial collecting

⁷⁸¹ Southwood, "A cultural history," 312.

shone through in exhibitions such as *Collecting the World* (1995), which as Curtis and Southwood have pointed out, was not unproblematic nor was it without criticism given its tendency to privilege the collectors' voices in the stories of the objects. Most recently, Mitchell's *Beaver* pipe was displayed as one of King's Museum's "100 Curiosities," and was presented as an example of the complex and ambivalent nature of Indigenous-European relationships in the contact zone of the Canadian fur trade. Chapter 2 showed how museum curators' recognition of the "hybridity" and versatility of argillite carving reflects contemporary anthropological and art historical beliefs in the idea of cultural production as a dynamic, and not static process. This thesis is the first study to investigate the modes of display through which the argillite carvings in these museums have been interpreted.

6.3 The movement of objects in the fur trade

Establishing the original contexts in which these objects were created and circulated was a key objective and unique contribution of this research. Fur trade records showed the Northwest Coast from the 1820s to 1860s to have been a dynamic contact zone in which objects, languages and visual cultures were negotiated, exchanged and appropriated. Hudson's Bay Company post records and Haida argillite carvings were presented as different kinds of evidence of the intercultural interactions which

occurred at trading posts and on ships, and later, at developing colonial centres such as Victoria.

As the decades of the land-based fur trade transformed into a developing settler-colonial state on the Northwest Coast, the balance of power between Natives and newcomers shifted towards increasing Indigenous political and social inequality. Chapter 3 identified the beginnings of the settler-Indigenous relationship as this contact zone became less about the control and movement of commodities as about the control of land and natural resources, an issue that continues to define and trouble the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the settler-Canadian state. The Scottish collections investigated here were all formed under circumstances created through imperial trade or colonial agendas, and as such they can be understood as “witnesses” to the complex dynamics that contributed to the development of Canada.⁷⁸²

6.4 *Souvenirs and specimens*

The argillite collections of Robertson, Mitchell, Hector and Rae were points of entry into four individual but interrelated stories of travel, trade and intercultural exchange on the Northwest Coast. The research for this thesis began in the museum stores with these men’s collections, from which I traced their travels through Western Canada, routes that were constructed to various degrees through record holdings in the

⁷⁸² Phillips and Steiner, *Unpacking Culture*, 3.

Hudson's Bay Company Archives and the Provincial Archives of British Columbia.

Their stories show how each collector contributed to various colonial processes, including the establishment of imperial trade networks and the mapping and surveying of territory on the Northwest Coast. This thesis thus proposed that their collections are indivisible from imperial histories.

My research revealed that as early as 1824, Colin Robertson had written to his friend and colleague James Murray Yale, a well-traveled fur trader working west of the Rocky Mountains, to collect curiosities on his behalf. Robertson's 1833 donation to the Perth Literary and Antiquarian Society contained a number of Coast Salish objects, compiled onto a collection list signed by Yale. The second part of Robertson's collection, whose object list is unsigned, was a challenge to trace, however I proposed in Chapter 4 that this group of objects may have been organized around the Fort Vancouver area, which was the HBC's Columbia Department headquarters from 1824. I argued that Robertson's Perth donation functioned as an act of self-commemoration, which projected an image of a well-traveled and knowledgeable collector. This eclectic "curiosity" collection fits his contemporaries' descriptions of Robertson as an eccentric dilettante.

"Captain" William Mitchell's collection of ship pipes appeared to be the most personalized of the four collectors, given his long career trading up and down the

Northwest Coast on various HBC ships. Though Mitchell left no records of his life or work, his contemporaries remembered him as a nostalgic character, a profile that corresponds with his collection of the *Beaver* pipe, which is now one of the University of Aberdeen Museum's most valued possessions. Largely undocumented, Mitchell's collection is enigmatic, and he could have collected the argillite and other Northwest Coast objects at any of the places he lived and worked, including Victoria, the *Beaver* steamship, Fort Simpson or on the west coast of Moresby Island, where Mitchell interacted with Haida people in the early 1850s.

Though Hector's collection appears to have been the least personalized, it is difficult to reach definitive conclusions since he did not refer to it, nor to the Northwest Coast peoples he encountered on Vancouver Island in his Palliser Expedition reports. His collection of various works of argillite fits his research profile as a geologist, and he did report more generally on argillites, shales and other mineral specimens collected on his Canadian travels. Since Hector donated the collection immediately upon his return to Edinburgh (prior to his departure for New Zealand), his donation was likely a response to the Museum's call for specimens collected through its connections with Scots engaged in various imperial projects abroad. As such, I proposed that Hector's argillite collection functioned at the Industrial Museum as specimens of the industrial arts and as examples of the manufactures of Indigenous

peoples whose authenticity was seen as imperilled by encroaching settlement. In showing how Hector promoted the “civilization” of First Nations through the adoption of religion and agriculture (views shared by his contemporaries), this thesis situated Hector’s collection in the context of his contribution to colonial processes.

Chapter 4 exposed the challenging nature of Rae’s Northwest Coast collection. This collection warrants new research given Rae’s extensive North American travels in the later, less understood decades of his career. Rae like Hector contributed to the development of colonial infrastructures through his work on 1864’s telegraph survey. Rae could have acquired his two argillite plates at Victoria but as demonstrated in Chapter 4, he seems to have acquired at least some of the northern Northwest Coast objects through connections at Fort Simpson, that major trade hub which was also a gathering place for Haidas and various other northern groups. Though all four of these collections reflect the biographies of their collectors to some extent, they raise more questions than answers, such as the identities of the Haida artists and the trade middlemen who circulated these delicate objects intact along fur trade routes and through bustling trade centres.

Chapter 4 therefore investigated the various cultures of collecting in which these argillite works were acquired, and revealed the new meanings they gained upon collection. Originated as trade commodities, re-framed as curiosities, souvenirs and

scientific specimens, these collections and their various wrappings reflected, in turn, the changing character of relationships between Europeans and Indigenous peoples through the middle decades of the nineteenth century. As such, these carvings were shown to be participants in discourses of exploration, science and colonization.

6.5 Commodities and cultural patrimony

Exposing the theme of cultural patrimony was an initially unexpected yet key contribution of this research. As audience members at my slide presentations on Haida Gwaii and many others commented, Haida argillite has for over two centuries been used as a means of economic agency, and the right to quarry it, carve it, tell stories through it, and put it into circulation is exclusively Haida. In this sense, works of argillite, as Roth observed, are the alienable products of a patrimony considered inalienable.

Still, my fieldwork interactions on Haida Gwaii suggested that Haidas' attitudes towards nineteenth-century objects in public museum collections reflected their sense of ownership over the meanings and values of these things, regardless of the historical commoditization of the objects. This finding is theoretically compelling because it challenges conceptions of historical argillite carvings as inherently alienable commodities. Identifying this assumption as a misconception was therefore a novel and important contribution of this thesis. Furthermore, I proposed that destabilizing

the historical statuses of objects and recognizing their capacity to be re-wrapped with new meanings and values could have implications for future negotiations between museums and Indigenous source communities regarding access to, or return of objects of material heritage.

6.6 Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated how argillite carvings in historical Scottish museum collections have been “entangled” in complex and ambivalent relationships between Indigenous people, Euro-North Americans and Europeans. I argued that the hybrid and transcultural character of the nineteenth century Northwest Coast contact zone was reflected in, for example, the Haida argillite ship pipes produced during that time.

Further research into the lives and identities of Aboriginal and European middlemen, such as James Murray Yale, Donald Macaulay and Tom, the Haida traveler/interpreter, would yield new insights into the political and social dynamics at work during the fur trade. These people were the cultural go-betweens through whom various objects of exchange including argillite (the first consciously-produced Indigenous souvenir items on the Northwest Coast) were made available to the world.

HBC governor George Simpson, one of the more ambivalent characters of that era, characterized the cultural landscape of the mid-nineteenth century Northwest Coast as “the nicest confusion of tongues that has ever taken place since the days of

the Tower of Babel.”⁷⁸³ A deeper understanding of the people, languages and protocols of historical intercultural trade would enrich our understanding of the ongoing and still-dynamic exchanges around these compelling objects.

⁷⁸³ George Simpson, *Narrative of a Journey Round the World, during the years 1841 and 1842* (London: Henry Colbourn, Publisher, Great Marlborough Street, 1847), 176.

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